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TINY COMPO: What 80's
band sang *Brothers In Arms*?

ISSUE #153 APRIL 2005

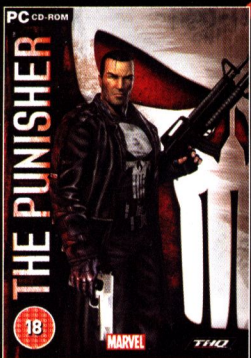
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THE FIRST AND BEST FOR PC GAMES

BROTHERS IN ARMS: ROAD TO HILL 30

Blown apart! The ultimate WWII shooter!



Agent Provocateur

I've been negotiating with Ubisoft for the past month in a vain attempt to wrest some royalties out of any future sales of *Far Cry*. Since my

impassioned pleas last month for everyone in this fair land to purchase a copy, sales have literally smashed through the roof again, and it's now back in the charts, where it should remain for ever and a day. I didn't realise my own power. So, this month, I'd like to point out that Coventry City are, in fact, the best football team in the world (league position notwithstanding), *City Of God* is one of the best films ever, and *Curb Your Enthusiasm* the most sublime sitcom ever. Watch them all hit the top spot this time next month (with the exception of Coventry City, obviously).

On a rather more serious note, I attended a libel course this month, which aside from providing me with some amusing stories of angry celebs suing magazines, taught me what I can and can't say about people in the magazine. Were I, for example, to say that Jamie Sefton is an extremely bad loser, and a tight Northerner to boot, I should be OK. (The former is documented in video evidence and the latter is evident every time we go to the pub.) However, if I were to reveal that he has a penchant for dressing in lady's undergarments I could well be in trouble. It's damaging to his reputation, you see.

And herein lies the interesting rub. Having libelled him in print, it's now up to Jamie 'AP' Sefton as to whether he wants to pursue the case against me. If he does, he can take me to court and sue me and the magazine to within an inch of our lives. And, get this, all while still wearing lady's underwear – the law requires no proof such as a downing of his kecks. If successful, I'll be tossed out of my job onto the streets of London, leaving Mr Sefton to take over the reigns of Britain's longest-running PC games magazine. Whose photo will be here next month? Only Jamie knows the answer...

Dave Woods
Editor

P64



COVER DISCS P136 →

■ DEMOS AND MOVIES!

Strike from the dark in the gorgeous *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory*, somersault your way through *Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within* and break the mould with *Darwinia*. Plus, dribble that ball in UEFA Champions League 2004-2005!

■ DVD EXCLUSIVES

Demos of *Republic: The Revolution* and *Ford Racing 3*, plus ALL of the finalists of the 'Make Something Unreal' competition, *World Of Warcraft* Community Chest, *Half-Life 2* mods, essential demos and more!



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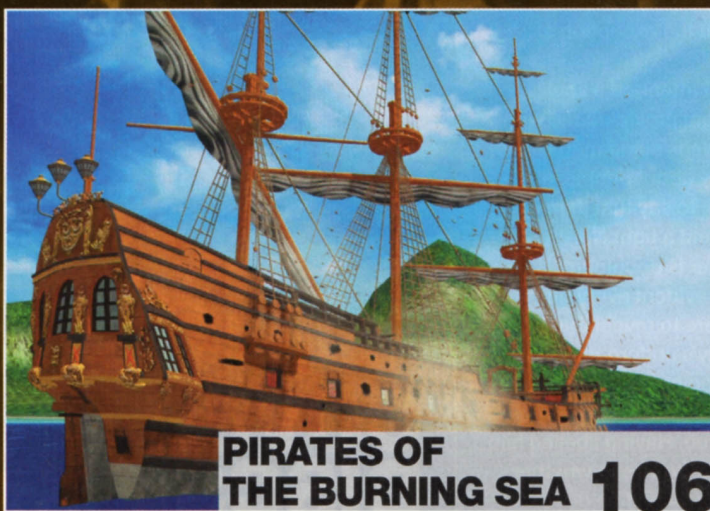
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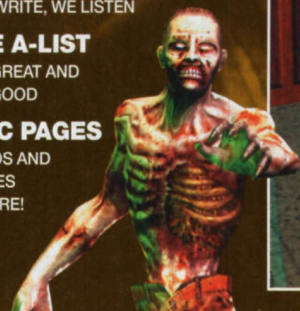
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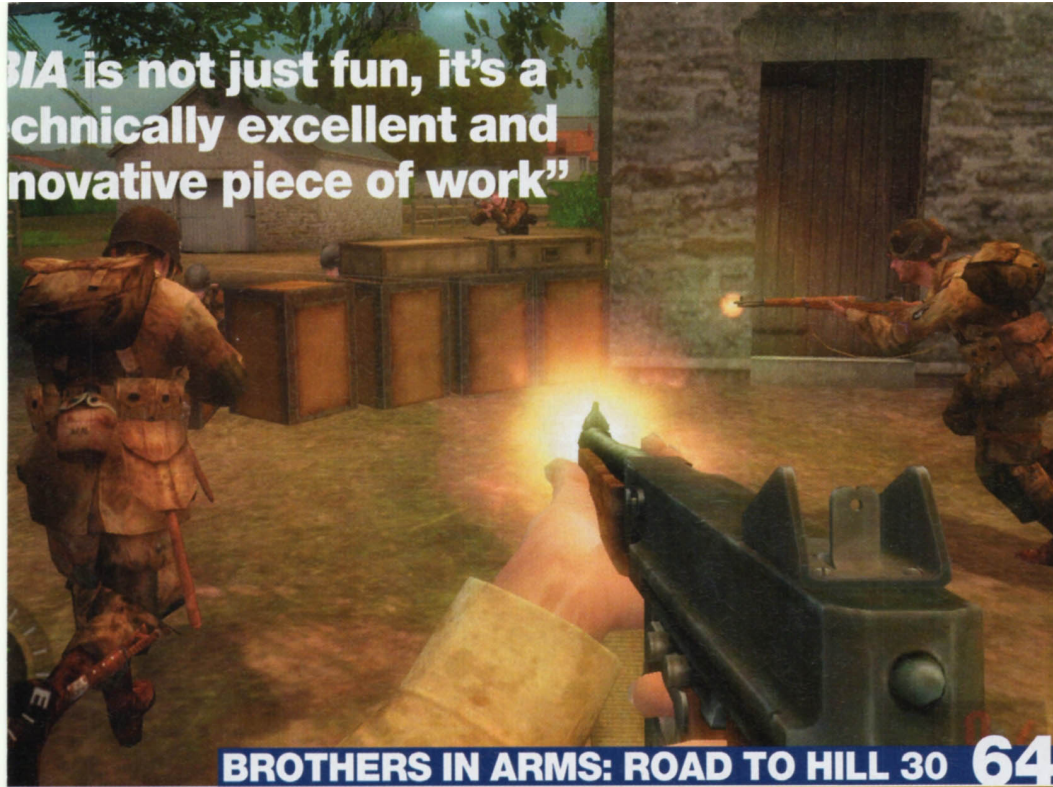
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WIN!

TINY COMPO Correctly answer this month's cover question and you could win some goodies. Send your entry on a postcard addressed to: Tiny Compo (153), PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6FP. The first correct entry plucked out of the hat wins a mystery prize. Closing date: March 30, 2005. The winner of our Jan Tiny Compo (151) was Mark Studley from somewhere near Chester. He wins a copy of Tribes: Vengeance for his remarkable achievement of knowing the title of Star Wars: Revenge Of The Sith.

GENERAL COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS: 1. Only completed entries received before the closing date will be entered. 2. Winners will be notified by post. 3. No cash alternative. 4. Prizes not necessarily as shown. 5. No correspondence will be entered into. 6. The editor's decision is final. 7. Responsibility cannot be accepted for lost or undelivered entries. 8. Competitions are not open to readers outside the UK or employees of Future or its affiliated companies, their families, agents or anyone professionally connected with the competition. Egad!

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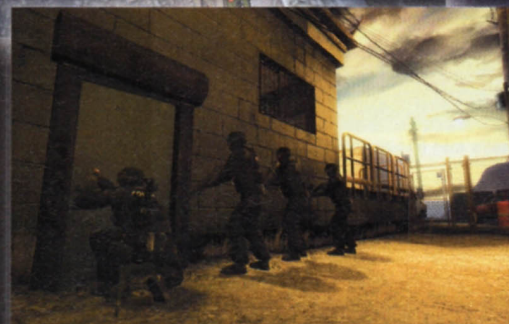
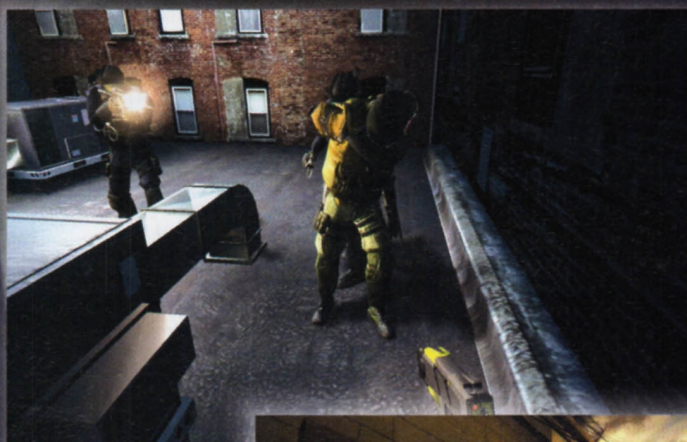
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THE CALL.



SWAT4
SPECIAL WEAPONS AND TACTICS

**FIRST
Look!**

Hello Moto...

MOTOGP: ULTIMATE RACING TECHNOLOGY 3

First screenshots and info from Climax's third, two-wheeled racer

SPEED DEMON Martin Korda

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

PUBLISHER THQ
DEVELOPER Climax
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE TBA
WEBSITE www.climaxgroup.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Realistic yet forgiving two-wheeled racing action
- Three distinct bike classes
- Two diverse racing modes
- Real-life races and riders
- 32 tracks
- Promising physics, sound and visuals

"We've made the bikes much faster, with more emphasis on throttle control"

GREG BRYANT LEAD DESIGNER



That's one happy looking road.



Down boy, down.



The first mainstream bike sim?

WHAT'S THIS, a motorbike game sequel for the PC? Nay, a potentially excellent motorbike game sequel for the PC? You know, it just might be.

So what's new this time around? Well, for starters, Climax – the team responsible for the first two *MotoGP* games – is adamant that it wants to open up the genre to newcomers and non-hardcore biking enthusiasts, by attempting to strike a perfect balance between realism and fun. "We've decided to go down a similar route to *Gran Turismo*," explains Greg Bryant, the game's lead designer. "We want *MotoGP 3* to have plenty of hardcore simulation elements, but at the same time, we want it to be forgiving enough on the track to still be fun and accessible."

NEED FOR SPEED

By fine-tuning the racing model, Climax hopes you'll be spending less time skidding across the tarmac on your padded rear and more time skidding around corners straddling your crotch rocket. "We've made the bikes much faster and we've put much more emphasis on throttle control," says Greg. "We also want to iron out the parts of the



Bikes will range from light 600cc models to 1200cc metallic monsters.

game that made *MotoGP 2* tricky, like over-sensitive handling at high speeds, so we've tightened up the leaning."

MotoGP 3 is set to feature two very distinct racing modes, with Climax introducing an all-new Extreme mode to complement the series' standard MotoGP Championship. In this, you can race for teams such as Ducati and Kawasaki, and compete against current greats such as Valentino Rossi over a 16-race season.

FOR PINKS, PUNK

If you prefer to race for money rather than points, there's also Extreme mode – leaving you free to splash your cash on bike upgrades and more powerful bikes. Extreme is set to come with 16 fictional courses ranging from the claustrophobic confines of Tokyo's city streets to the sprawling desert expanses of Qatar.

"Extreme mode features three very distinct bike classes," reveals Greg. "You start off with a 600cc bike and you'll be

able to upgrade various components, blueprint your engine and make sure it's all running smoothly. You can also tune your bike and tweak gear ratios, and then move up to 1000cc and 1200cc bikes."

We got a chance to straddle all three and found each class has its own distinct characteristics. The 600cc models lacked straight-line speed but glided around corners, while the 1200cc hulks accelerated with ferocious power, causing the screen to shake as our surroundings blurred into a streaming mass of colours. 1000cc bikes were somewhere in-between the two and proved the most satisfying ride of all.

Graphically crisp and slickly presented, even at this early stage *MotoGP* is looking like it could be a real winner. And with more info and access promised soon – as well as what Climax is claiming will be an exciting revelation about the game's multiplayer options – you can rest assured that an update will be burning a rubbery trail your way in the very near future. **PC2**



MotoGP 3 features all of the Championship liveries... ...And conveys a superb sense of speed.





"They told me he was bad, but I knew he was sad, that's why I fell for the leader of the pack."

BRAKE DANCING

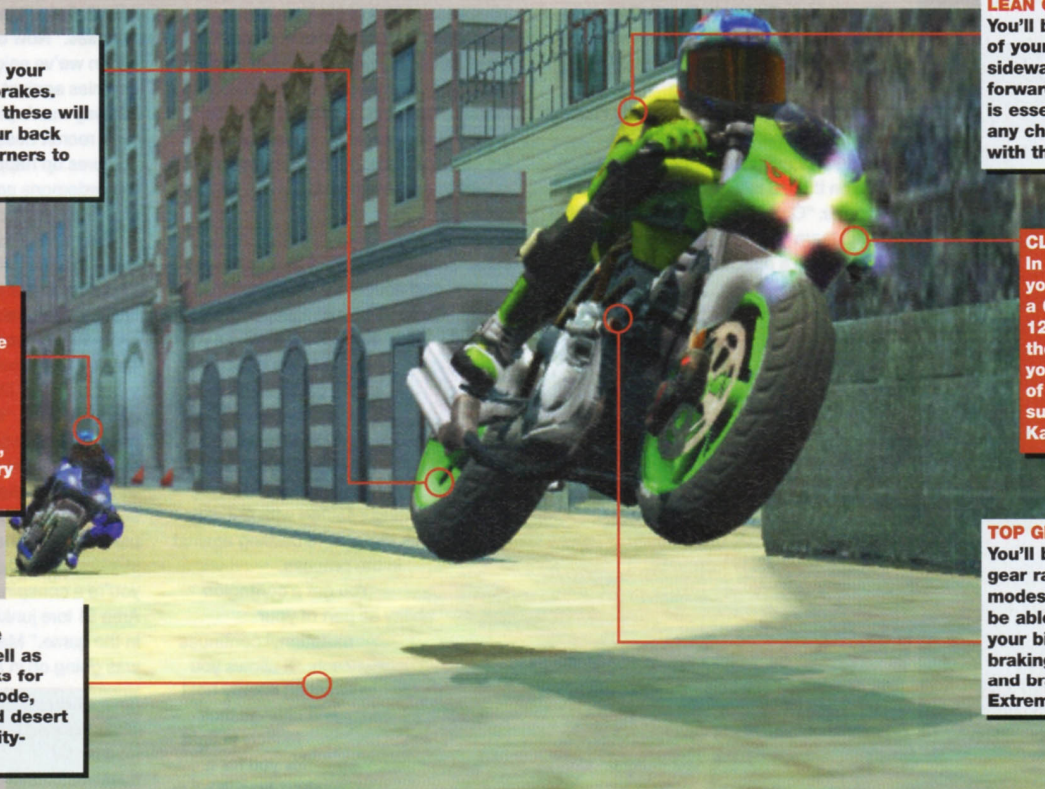
You must control both your bike's front and rear brakes. Mastering how to use these will enable you to skid your back wheel when taking corners to gain an extra edge.

OPPOSING FORCE

While the opposition in *MotoGP 3*'s Extreme mode is fictional, you can expect to race against the very best real-life riders in the Championship season, including the legendary Valentino Rossi.

KEEPING TRACK

There'll be 16 real-life MotoGP circuits as well as 16 fictional race tracks for the Extreme racing mode, ranging from rural and desert tracks to night-time city-based circuits.



LEAN ON ME

You'll be fully in control of your rider's leaning – sideways, backwards and forwards. Mastering leaning is essential if you're to stand any chance of competing with the big boys.

CLASSY BIKES

In Extreme mode, you can ride either a 600cc, 1000cc or 1200cc bike, while in the GP Championship, you get to drive all of this season's bikes such as Ducatis and Kawasakis.

TOP GEAR

You'll be able to tweak your gear ratios in both racing modes. However, you'll also be able to play around with your bike's traction, stability, braking, weight reduction and brake horsepower in Extreme mode.

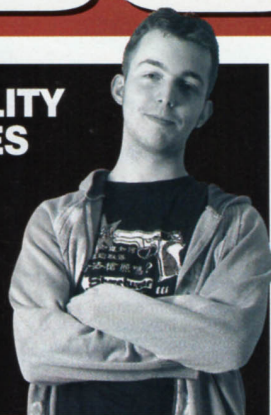


ALL THE NEWS, VIEWS AND RUMOURS FROM THE WORLD OF PC GAMING

BULLETIN



REALITY BYTES



■ NEWS EDITOR Will Porter

▲ The other day myself and Ms Wallace got to happily reminiscing about the first time we had sex with a prostitute in a GTA game, before running her over and stealing our money back. It's a precious moment that so many of us share, but thankfully it's fictional. Cut to a mere three days later, when my good self was having a meaningless amble around London – Soho to be precise. Hearing loud hip-hop music I tracked it to its source. I turned a corner and found an Eastern European lady doing squat-thrusts at me from a doorway. I was quite scared, and had to go and look at statues in Pall Mall for half an hour to recover.

Through these two isolated incidents, we find one of the many areas in which reality and gaming separate. A great gaming moment, and a seedier truth. I bring this up mainly because I've been worrying that sometimes we automatically assume that all gamers are intelligent well-rounded chaps, when some of us are actually quite naive. When people play the apparently realistic *Brothers In Arms*, does everyone really think, "Well, this is pretty hairy, but back then it must have been horror, blood and tears?" Or do they just shoot stuff? Are games numbing the edges of the way some people look at history? Am I turning into a *Daily Mail* reader?

It's an extremely hard question to answer. All I know is that I look at *GTA* prostitutes a bit differently this week – and I feel guilty when I kill them. Anyway, that's the end of my philosophising. Perhaps if we just all watch more documentaries and read *The Guardian* everything will turn out OK. Hoorah.

ALIEN NATION

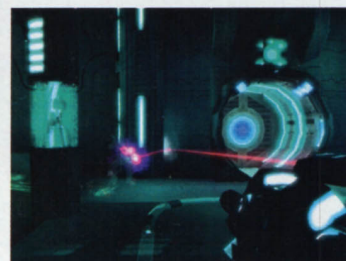
CONSPIRACY THEORISTS DISCOVER THAT AREA 51 DOES EXIST – THE DIGITAL VERSION AT LEAST



Members of the squad get steadily offed until you're on your lonesome.



Have big gun, will travel.



ET go home.

MIDWAY IS on a bit of a roll at the moment, having secured forthcoming *Unreal* titles and a steady stream of decent console fare, such as *The Suffering* and *Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy*. Pride of place in its showroom at the moment, however, is *Area 51*, a shooter that picks up UFO folklore and runs with it.

"You play the role of US Army Hazmat specialist Ethan Cole," explained producer Zach Wood when we quizzed him on the PC release of his relentless shooter. "Cole is sent into Area 51 with a small team on an emergency call to investigate a bio-chemical outbreak. When you arrive, you

find out that a previous team had been sent in and communication with them has been lost. You soon discover, however, that the outbreak is an alien virus that is mutating the base inhabitants." The game then turns, apparently, into a fight for survival – while said virus rampages itself towards destroying every scrap of life on earth. Moral of the story: don't trust viruses.

That's the plot then, but clearly the impetus for the game is shooting lots of monsters in the face with a wide array of large guns. The game begins on the top level of the military base with a squad of three, before taking your team deeper and deeper into the mysteries of Area 51 and its spiky-toothed residents. Eventually all your mates are offed, and the game takes a much more survivalist stance as you battle your way through on your tod – getting infected with the alien virus that you're battling against in the process.

"You get a contagion ability as part of your mutation," continues Zach. "It allows you to infect an enemy host and change their faction to fight for you for a short time. It's fun

to infect an enemy from a distance and watch the fight that breaks out as your new mutated friend goes aggro on your enemies." Now ever since the days of *Doom* we've enjoyed turning our enemies against each other, and the Midway man's promise that you can even recruit bosses with your contagion conjures up happy memories of pitting Cyberdemons against Spider Masterminds back in the olden days.

We're not suggesting that *Area 51* is going to be a life-changing experience, but it shows every sign of being an enjoyable blast through an intriguing environment – the domain of *The X-Files*' smoking man and various *Independence Day* aliens pickled in formaldehyde. "It was a big part of our pre-production phase to research as much of the lore surrounding the base as possible," explains Zach, clearly slightly weary from trawling through the paranoid frenzies of various shotgun-stroking American isolationists. "So if you're a conspiracy theorist or an avid Area 51 lore junkie, you'll love the detail in the game." Makes you wonder what was going on in Area 52 doesn't it?

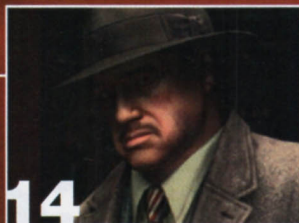
■ Publisher: Midway
■ Developer: Midway
■ ETA: Q2
■ Website: www.area51-game.com





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THE GODFATHER
Brando back from the dead



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SUDEKI
Xbox role-player comes to PC



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SOMETHING UNREAL
One mod contest to rule them all

THE MATRIX REBOOTED

SHINY HAS ANOTHER CRACK AT BULLET-TIME WITH *THE MATRIX: PATH OF NEO*

Once a licence that could have printed money, *Matrix* games must now sell through quality rather than rampant fanboy adoration. We can only hope then, that *The Matrix: Path Of Neo* lives up to its potential in the way that *Reloaded* and *Revolutions* quite obviously didn't.

A game that tracks the path of Mr Reeves through the trilogy, and indeed parts of *The Animatrix*, it will undoubtedly contain an abundance of slow-motion chop-socky and whizzing bullets. Scripted, again, by the Wachowskis themselves and with contractual likenesses of Neo, Morpheus, Trinity and Agent Smith, it may be easy to sniff at *Path Of Neo* after the abundantly

mediocre *Enter the Matrix* – but the stages of Neo's development to cyber-god are prime gaming fodder.

From the hesitant training in the virtual dojo, through to 'guns, lots of guns' and the skyscraper lobby, discovering the ability to fly and up to the ensuing airborne battles with Agent Smith – there's huge potential here for Shiny to make up for past wrongs and serve up a game that the original *Matrix* has always been crying out for. Fingers crossed.

■ **Publisher:** Atari
■ **Developer:** Shiny Entertainment
■ **ETA:** Q4
■ **Website:** www.atari.com



Half-Life In The Dock?

GERMAN CONSUMER RIGHTS GROUP SLAPS VALVE ON THE WRIST FOR ITS *HL2* ONLINE REGISTRATION FIASCO. WILL STEAM RISE IN THE UK TOO?

Finished lobbing barrels with your Grav Gun? Well, here's another adventure to tickle your trigger-fingers. Welcome, y'all, to the *Half-Life 2* show: a controversial soap opera that's throwing up surprises like a bulimic cannibal.

Following fever-pitch complaints about Steam, Valve's online subscription service, Germany's consumer association has sent a Cease and Desist

order to Vivendi and Valve, saying that the game's packaging is misleading at best. Without an Internet connection the world's greatest FPS is useless and this fact, our German comrades have pointed out, is barely declared on the box and does not appear in the game's End User License Agreement.

There is a brief mention of an Internet connection under 'Other' on the game's

system requirements, but was that enough to satisfy the German Consumer Association? Nein, mein gaming schnitzels. As a result, Vivendi has been ordered to either amend its packaging for Germany, separate Steam from *Half-Life 2*, or else face a hefty fine.

This appears to be the first brick through Valve/Vivendi's window following global grumbles about Steam. What's more, it probably won't be the last. Under the UK's Trade Descriptions Act any descriptions of goods sold must be accurate – it's an offence if they're not. Whether or not this leaves the Valve/Vivendi team open to similar wrist slapping in the UK, the legal experts will probably decide.

This is but the tail-end of consumer gripes. Buy a copy of the game with a CD-Key that's already been hacked and you'll have to wait up to two weeks to receive a replacement. Fancy selling the game after you've finished playing it? Not without paying a fee to transfer the CD-Key to another Steam account. This furore is likely to rumble on and on, especially if disgruntled gamers in the UK turn their words into action. Next stop, a Michael Moore documentary on this hullabaloo coming to a theatre near you (probably)...



Barney: looking suitably guilty?

**GOOD CROP
BAD CROP**



GOOD CROP

An earlier entry in Good Cop, Bad Cop bemoaning the difficulty in finding a

Peperami Firestick causing a deluge of Peperami-based goods flooding Will's desk.



Future Publishing's giant *Pro Evo* championship ending up in a classic Woods vs Sefton encounter, with Sefton the glorious victor.

Suze beating the *Gran Turismo* lap-time record of our neighbouring PSW magazine. On her first lap. Pretty much with her eyes closed.

BAD CROP

Going to stupid training courses and feeling as if we're back at school while surreptitiously making a fake magazine called *What Bees?* (incorporating *Wasp Monthly*).

Our editor ordering flowers online for a lovely Valentine and www.flyingbouquets.com not delivering. Anything. Thanks for nothing, guys.



Good Crop: **Wheat** Bad Crop: **Barley** Mainly because barley has a greater tendency to make you itch when making straw.

the write stuff

SPECIAL REPORT

Hot on the heels of Hollywood voice actors and composers, scriptwriters are now getting their interactive jollies. The writing's on the wall for PC games, reckons Pavel Barter



Call Of Duty: brilliantly scripted.



San Andreas is, hilariously enough, written by DJ Pooh.

FOR BETTER or worse, games have a way with words. From Sam Fisher "lit up like a Dutch brothel" in *Splinter Cell*, to *Half-Life 2*'s Barney explaining that "I'm already behind on my beatings this month," a good script is the steak inside every digital pie. Dodgy dialogue, Godzilla-sized plot-holes and lifeless characters are not what the doctor ordered.

Let's face it, the average adventure and game creator is no Alfred Hitchcock, so specialist scriptwriters should be encouraged. There are agencies that specialise in games writers, sure, but for every developer with deep pockets, there's a studio wordsmith salivating somewhere in LA. DJ Pooh, for example – the brains

behind comedy gangster movie *Friday* – helped pen *GTA: San Andreas* and is now hard at work on a gangster MMOG. In addition, when EA wanted to pump more adrenalin into its *James Bond* franchise, it hired Bruce Feirstein, who wrote *The World Is Not Enough*, *Tomorrow Never Dies* and *GoldenEye*.

As you read this, David McKenna, the writer of *American History X* and *Blow*, is busy scripting *Scarface* the game, due for release in late 2005. TV shows like *CSI*, *Star Trek* and *Law & Order* all brought their scribes to PC games. And after penning TV shows like *Spider-Man*, *Gl Joe* and *Babylon 5*, Christy Marx decided to focus her career on games like *Conquests Of Camelot: The Search For The Grail* and *The Matrix Online*. Even 2005's sci-fi FPS *Pariah* has been given a Tinseltown script treatment.

Hollywood scriptwriters' first foray into games was with interactive movies (such as the appalling *Phantasmagoria* which cursed CD drives worldwide in the early '90s). However, it wasn't until a few years later, when less wretched titles opted to spice up their plots, that the concept truly took hold. Flint Dille was one of the first movie/television writers to jump on board the good ship PC, scripting both *Nuclear Strike* (1996) and *Soviet Strike* (1997).

Although Dille continues to write movies for the big screen (his latest, *Backwater*, is released this summer), his love affair with games continues.

THE TALENT

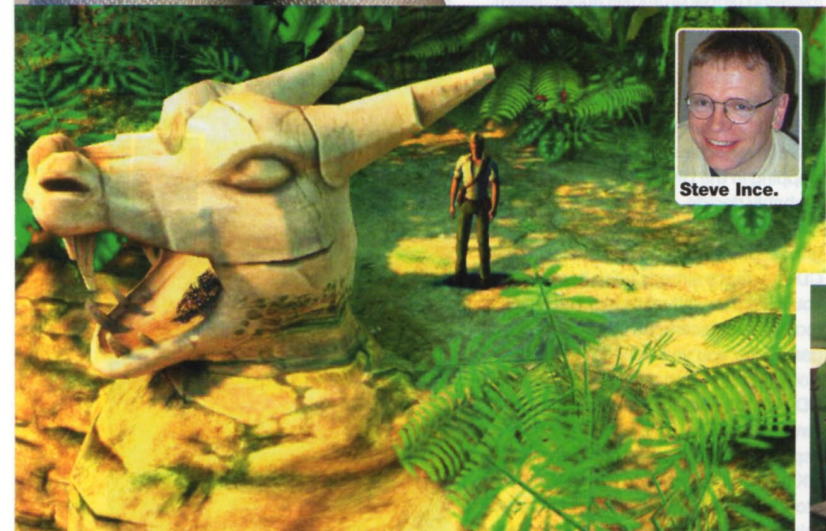
Dille recently completed work on the game adaptation of *Constantine*. If it's nearly as good as his wondrous *The Chronicles Of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay*, then we're in for a treat. He recalls: "Producer Pete Wanat said when he first pitched [*Chronicles*], 'In the first scene, Riddick is thrown into the prison; in the last scene, he gets out. The stuff in the middle is what you need to figure out.' Strange beginning to a fun project!"

Another acclaimed screenwriter, JT Petty, had just penned and directed the independent movie *Soft For Digging*, when he was drafted in to write *Splinter Cell*. Hang on a minute, isn't that Tom Clancy's baby? Nope, Clancy is but a branded name above the title, explains Petty. "We wanted to create a third-person stealth game in the techno thriller style of Tom Clancy. The concept, characters and story were developed by the designers and art directors; I wrote the scripts and everything was approved by Clancy's team."

Petty also wrote *Splinter Cell* sequel



Steve Ince.



Broken Sword: neat script but a lot of crates.



Phantasmagoria: how it used to be done.



Riddick's growls were impeccable.



Flint Dille.

From this to *The Chronicles Of Riddick*. How time flies...

Pandora Tomorrow and gets a warm glow when he thinks about Sam's stealthy antics. "A lot of my satisfaction with *Splinter Cell* comes from all the soap-opera drama, hidden in the eavesdropped conversations and chains of emails players can find. I like giving complicated home lives and personalities to all of the faceless guards you have the opportunity to kill. Hopefully, it makes players feel a little uneasy about wholesale slaughter."

KEEPING IT REAL

Sometimes scriptwriters are brought in at the 11th hour to cure ailing dialogue. Such was the case with Michael Schiffer (creator of blockbuster movies like *The Peacemaker* and *Crimson Tide*) and that sexy lump of World War II shrapnel, *Call Of Duty*. "This is not how people talk and not what they would have said in that era," Schiffer gently told the developer after one glance at the original script. He then immersed himself in the game, watching the developers play through on God mode, writing and rewriting until the dialogue was gnat's-arse tight.

But does Hollywood guarantee a tremendous story? Celluloid torture like *Gigli* or *Battlefield Earth* suggests it's not always a guaranteed success, so do movie writers ensure an unforgettable game experience? Well, just look at the Wachowski brothers' *Enter The Matrix* – there's always the risk that a Hollywood hotshot will bring absolutely nothing to the gaming experience.

"The advantage of having programmers and game designers write dialogue is that they fully understand the logic of a videogame," admits JT Petty. "When you bring in a scriptwriter from outside the team, you can end up with someone who's very good at telling a story,

but who doesn't really understand how a videogame works."

Flint Dille continues: "There are two kinds of screenwriter. There's the guy who sees his story clearly and the whole exercise is about realising a vision. Then there's the kind of guy who walks around with a bunch of ideas and characters in his head, but he isn't really sure how they all fit together. The second type is better suited for videogame writing. You have to be very loose and fluid and realise that you're serving a lot of masters."

PAST MASTERS

Specialist games writers are painfully aware of the glamorous allure of motion picture veterans. Having worked on the first two *Broken Sword* games, Steve Ince accepted writing duties for *The Sleeping Dragon* and before putting pen to paper, researched historical artefacts and visited pagan locations for inspiration.

"Being a Hollywood writer is no guarantee that you'll end up with something flawless," Ince says. "It's difficult to write the story and dialogue for a game in isolation from the gameplay design, so any Hollywood writer would have to understand that they're going to become part of an interactive process and work with the design team in order to get the best out of both sides. It helps if the writer understands development and design, and how the characters and story are expected to work in relation to the gameplay."

Just as superstar actors and fab voiceovers don't always go hand in hand, so celebrity scribblers are no guarantee that you'll wind up with a great plot. But at least developers are putting serious thought and cash into creating meaty

"Developers are putting serious thought and cash into creating meaty scripts"

scripts, and it's a trend that's set to continue. The Writers Guild of America – the official union representing scriptwriters – recently created a division for games writers. Electronic Arts, meanwhile, has opened a new office in Los Angeles, hiring traditional Hollywood writers and storyboarders to help develop its roster of games.

STARS IN THEIR EYES

IN A WEIRD REVERSAL OF ROLES, THESE GAMES WRITERS HAVE GRADUATED TO THE BIG SCREEN



JORDAN MECHNER

Having scripted and directed three *Prince Of Persia* games, Mechner finally found himself at the helm of documentary *Chavez Ravine: A Los Angeles Story* (2003), narrated by Cheech Marin of *Cheech & Chong* fame.



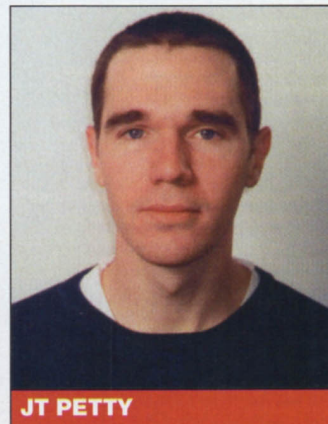
AMERICAN MCGEE

Jerry Bruckheimer, the *Pirates Of The Caribbean* producer, recently bought the option for a trilogy of films based on American McGee's *Oz*. The strangely monickered auteur is set to script the first film.



MATTHEW COSTELLO

Doom 3's plot wasn't exactly taxing, but writer Matthew Costello's monstrous shenanigans were enough to get him noticed by *Re-Animator* director Brian Yuzna. Costello has penned Yuzna's movie *Beneath Still Waters* (2005).



JT PETTY

As if undertaking the voice direction for EA's *Batman Begins* spin-off wasn't enough, the *Splinter Cell* writer is bringing Sam Fisher to the big screen with an adaptation for Paramount to be released in 2006.

Michael Ironside provides the voice, JT Petty writes the words.





Chris Delay
Darwinia creator and plucky independent
games man at Introversion Software

DEVELOPERS' QUESTION TIME

What's your role at Introversion?

My job title is 'director of special projects', but that's mostly because we just made up some interesting job titles for ourselves. I design and program all our games.

What PC games are you playing at the moment?

I've been playing *Counter-Strike: Source* a lot recently – it's a great game that never really gets boring. I've also been playing *Halo 2* on Xbox.

What was the last videogame you finished playing?

I just finished *Half-Life 2* a couple of weeks back. It's amazing that every single level has something special and memorable about it.

What's your favourite game of all time?

Zelda: Ocarina Of Time on the N64. I've never played in a more seamless or complete world before or since. Every single aspect of that game was perfectly balanced.

What are you most proud of in your career?

Darwinia of course! *Uplink* was a great game but it was never as satisfying to create, and the other games I've worked on for commercial companies don't deserve a mention.

Who do you most admire in the industry and why?

I'm in awe at Valve for being the first major developer to stick up for itself and release its game in a way that earns it the majority of the profits. It's the first time a major developer has held all the cards.

What's your company's philosophy?

Creative freedom comes first, everything else is secondary. We appreciate that every other games company says that as well, but we actually mean it.

What's the best thing about your job?

I get to work on the games I want to work on. I don't think there's anywhere else in the games industry I could go and have as much creative freedom as I have at Introversion.

What's the worst thing about your job?

At the moment, four weeks before the launch of *Darwinia*, I honestly can't think of anything.

What are you working on at the moment?

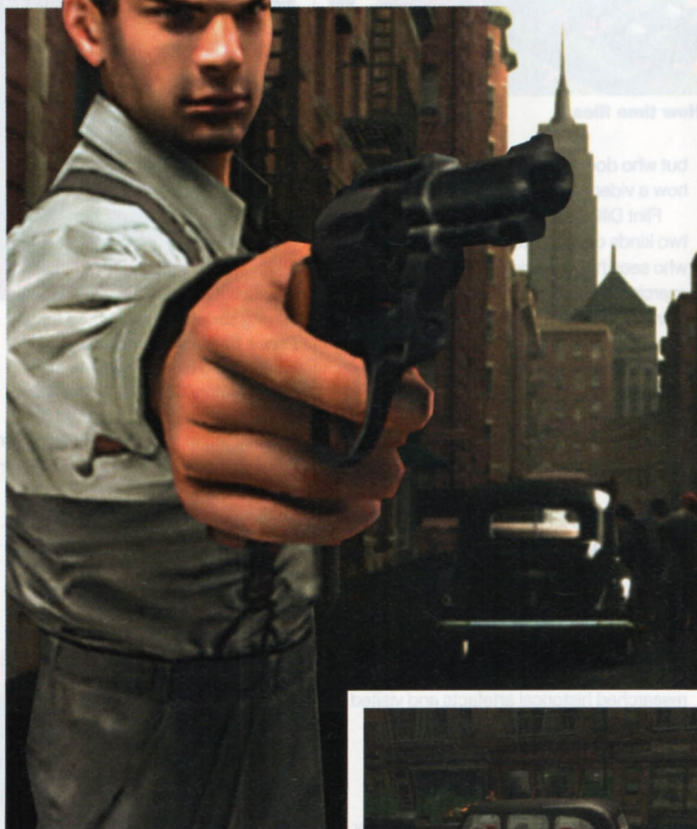
Darwinia is finished, but I'm still working on the demo release and various other promotional tasks that need doing. There's always a lot to do even after the game has been finished.

What's the Next Big Thing in PC gaming?

I've no idea. But I suspect every FPS for the next year will have a gravity gun.

RE-MADE MAN

MARLON BRANDO RETURNS FOR A FINAL CURTAIN CALL IN EA'S TAKE ON *THE GODFATHER*



The GTA bandwagon gets some class.

THEY MAY not be the films that come immediately to mind in the long list of possible movie-to-game blockbusters, but if you remember the intrigue and engaging array of characters in *Mafia*, you must also realise that a Mob game done well is something to celebrate.

Drawing on the rich background of *The Godfather* films, *The Godfather* game draws from the 1945-55 timescale of the first movie – perhaps suggesting that EA has a trilogy masterplan up its sleeve, thereby further suggesting that the third one will be crap and needlessly star Francis Ford Coppola's daughter.

As it stands, the title is set to be a free-roaming game of the accustomed third-person variety, although we're expecting something far deeper than the plethora of absent-minded GTA-hacks that have been appearing of late. As a previously untouched new character, the game will see you rising through the echelons of the Corleone family, guided by prominent members of the



The real Mafia 2?

clan and sparring with the rich supporting cast – many of whose stories, trials and tribulations will be fleshed out to an extent that would have been impossible within the movies themselves.

YOU LOOKIN' AT ME?

Of course, such is the respect for *The Godfather* series there are fears that this will turn into a shallow monstrosity – but it could be magical. James Caan (Sonny Corleone) and Robert Duvall (Tom Hagen) have lent their voices and (younger) likenesses to the project after all. However, in a far bigger coup, amazingly enough even Marlon Brando himself recorded voiceovers for the game before his death last July.

What with *Scarface* getting a similar console treatment, it seems that



He's been out in the sun too long.

the Hollywood back catalogue has become ripe for the picking. And (as we approach the obvious and much over-used close of this news story) if EA nails the game then it could well be an offer that we can't refuse. I thank you.

■ Publisher: EA
■ Developer: EA
■ ETA: TBA
■ Website: www.eagames.com



WATER PALAVER

**ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3 EXPANSION
TURNS UP SOAKED TO THE SKIN**

THE PREVIOUS incarnations of *Rollercoaster Tycoon* spat out a fair few lumps of expansion, but whether they were *Time Twisters*, *Wacky Worlds*, *Loopy Landscapes* or *Corkscrew Follies*, they were pretty much variations on the same theme. The latest and greatest version however has come up with something a bit more innovative.

A number of *Soaked's* 50 new attractions will, of course, be of the coaster variety – but the majority will feature (as you may have guessed by now) rides and shows that concentrate on getting your paying peeps doused in chlorinated water. So we're talking waterslides, flume-rides, beaches and wave machines; as well as a range of more sedate attractions like aquariums

and sealife starring dolphins and whales. A bit like in *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*, only without the sci-fi bits. What's more, you'll also be able to design your own waterfalls and pools for the little people to paddle about in – word has it you'll even be able to tell when they take a crafty piss in the deep end. It's that realistic.

We can only commend an expansion that genuinely comes up with new ideas instead of wringing rehashed gameplay out of the original's template, which all in all means we have high hopes for *Soaked*. Even if the presence of fascist, fun-hating jobsworths armed with whistles are mysteriously absent from these screenshots.



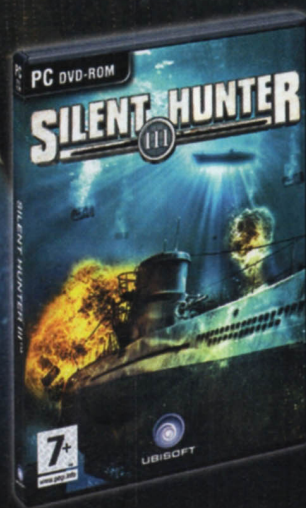
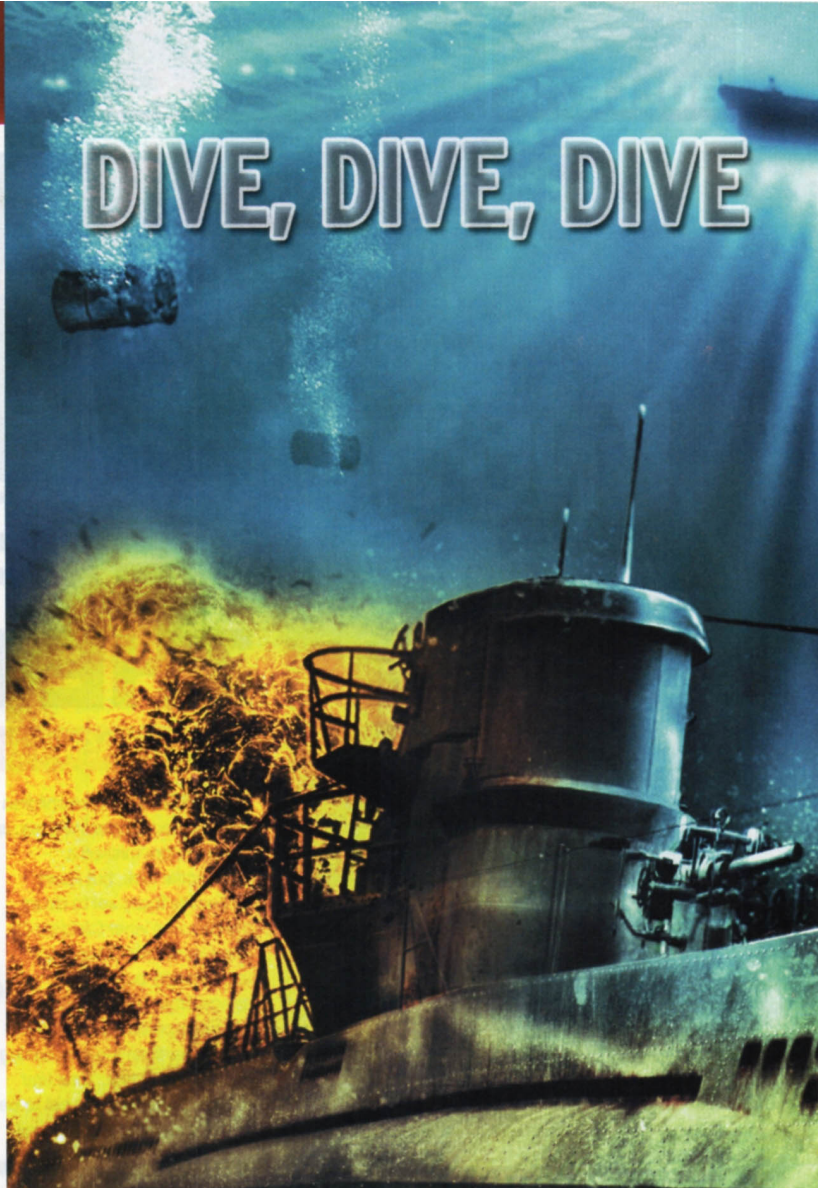
Yes. They can piss in the pool.



Remember, go on the green light.

Publisher: Atari **Developer:** Frontier Developments
ETA: June **Website:** www.atari.com/rollercoastertycoon/europe/uk/

DIVE, DIVE, DIVE



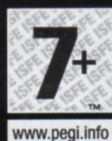
"SHIII surpasses anything out there" - TASKFORCE1x1

"Simply AWESOME!!!"
- Spirite

"Great graphics and details!"
- Drebbel

"It was like watching a movie!"
- RedTerex

March 2005



www.silent-hunteriii.com

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THE MAN WHO KNOWS

A JAPANESE woman has been arrested for **obliterating** her ex-boyfriend's online RPG existence. The **spurned** girlfriend, believed to be in her thirties, used her former lover's username and password to **log** on to his *Lineage II* account and **violate** his save game data, **destroying** all of the items, weapons and clothes that he had **painstakingly** collected. Although the **devastated** boyfriend suffered no financial loss, he reported the misuse of the account to the **police**. Instead of **laughing** him out of the door and telling him to get a **grip**, they passed on the case to the **Fukushima District Public Prosecutors Office**, accusing her of violating a law banning **illegal** access to someone else's online accounts. Ironically, the couple first met each other in the game world, later meeting up in real life to **consummate** the virtual relationship. The woman has **admitted** to the crime, scoffing: "I did it as revenge for breaking up with me."

The *Daily Mail* has yet again discovered that games turn kids into educationally subnormal **zombies**, incapable of absorbing even the most basic information and doomed to a pointless life of **dead-eyed misery**. TV's **Professor Robert Winston**, Britain's pre-eminent fertility expert, ejaculated: "Many children who love computer games find it hard to concentrate on the sort of tasks that require slow application and are necessary for school success."

Star Trek **spod** Wil Wheaton, who played **irritating** Wesley Crusher in *The Next Generation* before being **groomed** by an intergalactic travelling alien creature, has taken up residence as a gaming columnist. Moonlighting from the **tachyon fields** and **troublesome holograms** of his annoying day job, he now comments on gaming nostalgia from a podium at www.theonion.com. His mum was quite fit, even though she was also a **gamer**.

ZONE-discovered **funnyman** and **thought criminal** Charlie Brooker has a new television series, collaborating with life-hating fear-mongering comedian Chris Morris. Nathan Barley, previous star of Brooker's tv home website, gets a slot on **salacious** and **pornographic** television channel **Channel Four** every Friday. He'd be nothing without us. Really.

"Children who play games find it hard to concentrate on the tasks that require slow application, and are necessary for school success"



To think that all roads lead to this wooden city.



HEART OF THE MATTER

ROME WASN'T BUILT IN A DAY. NEITHER WAS HEART OF EMPIRE...

IT DOESN'T involve children being raised by giant wolves, and has therefore missed a substantial trick, but *Heart Of Empire* looks set to do for the Romans what *Children Of The Nile* did for Cleopatra's lot. It's a city builder that concentrates on the inner workings of the war machine's HQ, rather than the burgeoning Empire that *Rome: Total War* caters for, and it looks set to be a pretty competent one as well.



Obviously, there's all the normal sanitation issues and pleb happiness to consider (especially when you're rearranging the tourist map of Rome to your own whims), but you're also promised all the conspiracy and chin-stroking that the Senate can provide. Again, incestuous relationships and marriages with horses are low on the agenda, but the old ploy of appeasing

the masses by building a bloody great coliseum and letting them watch men chopping lumps off each other still holds firm.

With an interestingly freeform way of developing your metropolis, there's every chance that *Heart Of Empire* will appeal to the Caligula inside all PC gamers. Sick freaks.

Publisher: Deep Silver
Developer: Deep Red
ETA: August
Website: www.kochmedia.co.uk

Psi Me To The Moon

TEN COPIES OF PSI-OPS UP FOR LEVITATIONAL GRABS

LAST MONTH we had fun with a good game. The good game was called *Psi-Ops*. We threw screaming men into incinerators. We hurled screaming men into large fans. We threw screaming men into large crushing machines. Sometimes we even set them on fire. Then we had an ice-cream. Then we levitated a giant rolling ball and killed even more screaming men with it. It was a good day.

The nice men at Zoo Digital have given us ten big copies of the game and told us to give them away. We wanted to keep them but they said no and looked cross. Sometimes we wish we had magic powers too so we could make cross people go on fire or take over their heads so we could make them jump off roofs. But then there wouldn't be anyone to make games anymore and we would be sad. Anyway, here is a competition and it is good.

Which of the following historical figures has the least claim to being remotely psychic?

A. Cassandra of Troy B. Nostradamus
C. Bob Carolgees

Put your name, address and answer on a postcard and send it to us by March 30. We'll add it to a big pile, forget about it for a month and then say "Bugger!" and sort out the winners. Address is PC ZONE, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6FP.





EASTERN PLEASURE

SUDEKI ANNOUNCED FOR PC.
ROLE-PLAYERS RAISE EYEBROWS



A PARTY of four striding across a beautiful land, a string of slo-mo attacks that bring tears to the eyes and various other beast and bumpkins from developers who have clearly played too much *Zelda*: another previously Xbox-exclusive game comes home to roost on PC.

A role-playing game that mixes the combo attacks of *Phantasy Star Online* and *Final Fantasy*'s spellbook, *Sudeki* was released under a slightly *Fable*-tinged cloud on Xbox last year but could well fill a gap on PC. After all, we don't get oriental role-players as much as our bastard console contemporaries – even though this oriental RPG



Shiny, bright and beautiful yet apparently brimming with evil.

was made in Brighton.

A minor disagreement between some godly chaps has ripped a chunk of sanity out of the previously peaceful world of *Sudeki* y'see, and far away there's a being of colossal nastiness on the verge of resurrection. The usual suspects are pretty much all here – the

collection of crystals, the battering of bosses, the completion of quests and the frequenting of blacksmiths. *Sudeki* is squarely aimed for a release in March – we'll provide the review with all possible haste.

■ Publisher: Zoo Digital
■ Developer: Climax
■ ETA: March
■ Website: www.climaxgroup.com



ROUND-UP

HERDING FASCINATING NUGGETS OF GAMING INFORMATION INTO AN EASILY DIGESTIBLE PEN

Bark! Bark!



MASTER CHIEF NIXED



We always suspected that Master Chief's sturdy defence of earth and second bashing of the Covenant would never see the light of day on the PC – it just seemed too securely fastened to the Xbox bandwagon and the fervent promotion of Xbox Live. Well, now it's official – at least for the time being. Bungie has gone public, stating, "At the present time there are no plans to make PC or Mac versions of *Halo 2*." Never mind, we'll probably get over it.



DUKE NUKED



A source-based fan homage to Mr Nukem has received the Sword of Damocles treatment from 3D Realms. The mod, based on the classic *Duke 3D* shooter, was served the Cease and Desist order, presumably to protect the sanctity of the oft-delayed *Duke Nukem Forever*. As ever rumours of a DNF appearance at E3 are doing the rounds. Lies, damn lies? It's got to appear sometime...



LUCASARTS GIGGLES



Sam and Max are gone but not forgotten, or at least they are in a sly bit of LucasArts self-deprecation in console hit *Mercenaries*. A cut-scene's news feed claims, 'Omaha, NE: Cancellation of *Sam & Max* causes prison riot; National Guard called in to quell uprising.' While another states, 'Warren Commission determines that Greedo shot first.' We're still gunning for a potential *Mercenaries* PC release, until then we'll just smile wryly.



RETURN OF DIABLO?



More rampant speculation, but Blizzard North has stuck up a notice on its job page asking for 'an experienced game designer to help lead the team that designed *Diablo* and *Diablo II*.' We've put two and two together, and we reckon that it makes four. Either way, Blizzard is currently on such a high with *World Of Warcraft* that even this little tidbit is a mouth-watering proposition.



"As is well known for the fascist bastards, they take enjoyment in killing others, and the game rewards the player for killing common people. In fact, it is not possible to progress in the game without killing commoners, and the manufacturer plainly tells the player: those who have the courage to kill, are strong. Those who don't are weak."

The Maoist Internationalist Movement finds that KOTOR strongly ruptures its communist beliefs.

"RattHunter is a traditional first-person shooter set in a hi-tech environment. It does not push the envelope or bring something fresh to the genre, since we feel that there is little place for innovation in today's action games market."

The PR blurb for RattHunter. Well, at least it doesn't get your hopes up.



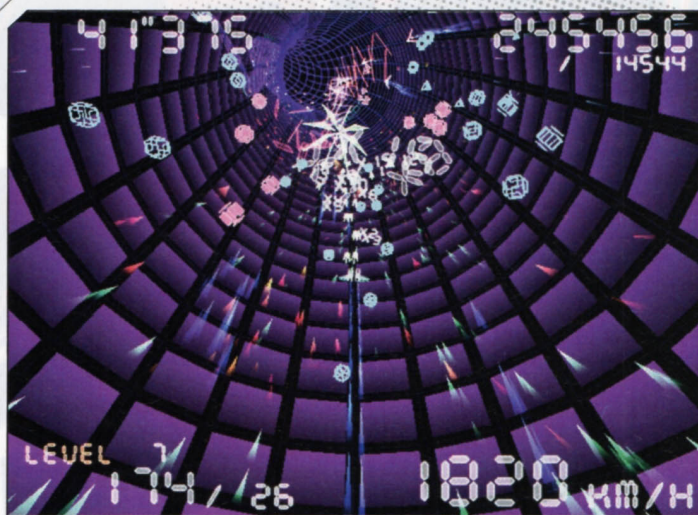
FREEWARE | HOME-BREWS | WEBGAMES | ABANDONWARE | EMULATION

FREEPLAY

Some of the best things in life are free! Anthony Holden's got the proof...

FREEPLAY is a new section in *PC ZONE* dedicated to the best free things you can do with your PC that don't involve naked ladies. The Internet is positively riddled with free games content, be it freeware, open source, abandonware, home-brews, webgames or emulation. And while a lot of it's junk, we're going to do our damndest to sort the shit from

the Shinobi and bring you the best of gratis gaming every month. Because Freeplay cares... This month, we show you how to get your hands on the classic adventure title *Beneath A Steel Sky*, how to emulate the most underrated N64 games and we get trigger-happy with this month's stellar Freeplay game *Torus Trooper*...



Hypnotised yet? See it in motion and you'll be transfixed.

TORUS TROOPER

Developer: ABA Games Website: www.asahi-net.or.jp/~cs8k-cyu

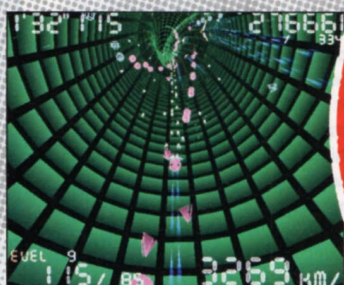
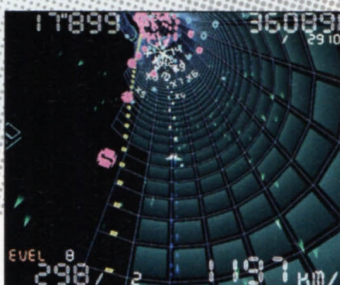


**FREE
GAME OF
THE MONTH!**

Reminiscent of games such as *Rez* and *Ballistics*, *Torus Trooper* is a dizzyingly fast shoot 'em up set on the inside of an infinite wireframe pipeline. To give you some indication of the game's intricacy, the instructions read as follows: 'Drive a ship forward and destroy enemies. When time runs out, game is over.' (Yes, I think we can safely skip the tutorial on this one.)

The game's true appeal lies in its stripped-back aesthetic – like the PS2 classic *Rez*, the speeding wireframe graphics are combined with pulsating dance beats to produce a hypnotic, almost Zen-like engagement. The enveloping grid of the track stretches before you without end; enemy ships unleash their attacks like clouds of pink cherry blossom; charged attacks rise from your ship like delicate snowflakes. It's really quite captivating.

To some, this will come as no surprise. The game's creator, Kenta Cho, is well known in Internet shmup circles, his games widely admired for their iconic graphics and subtle gameplay innovations. While you're on the website, check his previous work, *Tumiki Fighters*, for another slice of deranged Japanese shmupping.



TOBIRAGU

Developer: Keio Digital Vertex
Website: www25.big.or.jp/~kdv/tobiro.htm



Another game straight from the mad Japanese shmup department, *Tobiragu* is a side-scroller based in the world of Korean MMORPG *Ragnarok Online*. At a glance it appears to be a standard (if cutesy) shooter, but further investigation reveals a clever integration of RPG elements into the formula. So, instead of power-ups you get health and mana potions, and every time you shoot an enemy you do damage calculated by a behind-the-scenes dice-roll. Better yet, you gain experience from each kill, which is carried over even if you continue (meaning you can keep levelling up to face difficult bosses). The game's been around for a while, but is still worth a look if you like Japanese esoterica.



DAVID VS GOLIATH

Developer: Zango Games
Website: www.zango.com



Based (extremely) loosely on the myth of the little guy who makes good with a slingshot, *David Vs Goliath* is a reasonably enjoyable scrolling shooter riddled with laser-guns, hand grenades and angry chickens that fire eggs at your (mostly robotic) foes. It's a smooth and competent affair, with graphics that far exceed most freeware efforts.

One word of warning though: *David Vs Goliath* is, to put it bluntly, adware. If you still aren't with me, let's just say that Zango is a website that uses games and other 'free' software to plant unwanted software on to your system. *David Vs Goliath* is created by Zango Games, a division of adware company 180solutions, although to be fair you are warned about this and you are given the opportunity to uninstall anything and everything if you don't want to be bombarded by ads.

GOLDEN OLDIE: BENEATH A STEEL SKY

Download from: www.scummvm.org
Before *Broken Sword* was even a glimmer in Charles Cecil's eye, Revolution Software created this darkly futuristic point-and-clicker. The game, now considered a classic among adventure aficionados, was declared freeware in 2003, and is available for download on the ScummVM homepage (you need ScummVM to run it). Better yet, Revolution's first adventure game, *Lure Of The Temptress*, is also available as freeware on Revolution's homepage, www.revolution.co.uk. Add it to your inventory now.



EMULATION NEWS

WAITING FOR MARIO

PRACTICAL GAMECUBE EMULATION COMES ONE STEP CLOSER

With the previous generation of console hardware pretty much sewn up, the emulation scene is powering on with its attempts to crack the current systems. So far, the console that's proved the most susceptible to emulation is Nintendo's GameCube, and there are now at least two GC emulators capable of running commercial games (to some extent at

least). What's more, both of these have seen major new releases in 2005.

The most advanced emu is Dolphin, a 'proof of concept' designed to pave the way for more complete examples in the future. With progress slowing, the Dolphin team recently decided to cut its losses and release a so-called 'Final' version, now labelled v1.02. While certainly an

impressive step forward, the Final Release may be a little misleading, as Dolphin's compatibility with commercial GC games is minimal at best. Some 2D games such as *Bust A Move 3000* will run perfectly given the right PC, but beyond this, the only games said to be playable – with both sound and a decent frame-rate – are *Paper Mario 2*, *Ikaruga* and *Animal Crossing*.

The other emulator making good progress is Dolwin, which recently saw a major new v0.10 release. Dolwin does not yet play any games perfectly (none have sound), but the new release improves stability and support considerably.

www.dolphin-emu.com Dolphin homepage
dolwin.emulation64.com Dolwin homepage



TOP 5... UNDERRATED N64 GAMES

Emulate it with: 1964
1964emu.emulation64.com

- 1 BOMBERMAN 64
- 2 MYSTICAL NINJA STARRING GOEMON
- 3 PAPER MARIO
- 4 SPACE STATION: SILICON VALLEY
- 5 OGRE BATTLE 64: PERSON OF LORDLY CALIBER



WEBGAME OF THE MONTH



THE 2CH BATTLE

■ Developer: Next Frame
■ Website: www.12.plala.or.jp/nextframe/flash/the2chBattle.html

Continuing the theme of obscure Japanese weirdness, *The 2ch Battle* is a Flash-based fighting game built entirely out of ASCII (text) characters. The characters include a cat in a box, a ninja and an onion, but it's all perfectly reasonable, as 2ch (or 'Ni Channel') is the biggest and most influential bulletin board in Japan, and the characters

in the game are its mascots – most of which grew out of ASCII art on the BBS.

This aside, *2ch Battle* is an extremely well-executed piece of work, with detailed animations and fantastic special moves. Giko the Cat, for example, transforms into a giant mecha-dog (don't ask me why) and shoots a blue death ray, while Karutan launches a stream of what look like ASCII birds out of a bottle. We don't pretend to understand it, but there's certainly fun to be had here – even for a gaijin.

Before you ask, the menus are all in Japanese, but just select the top option in the first screen (Game Start), and in the next screen choose from Battle, Free Battle, Vs Battle, Training and Options. If this appeals, you might want to check out the rest of Next Frame's line-up (www.12.plala.or.jp/nextframe/index.html). There's some pretty interesting stuff there, including a promising mecha prototype called *Seventh Sky*, though without a rudimentary knowledge of Japanese they're mostly indecipherable.

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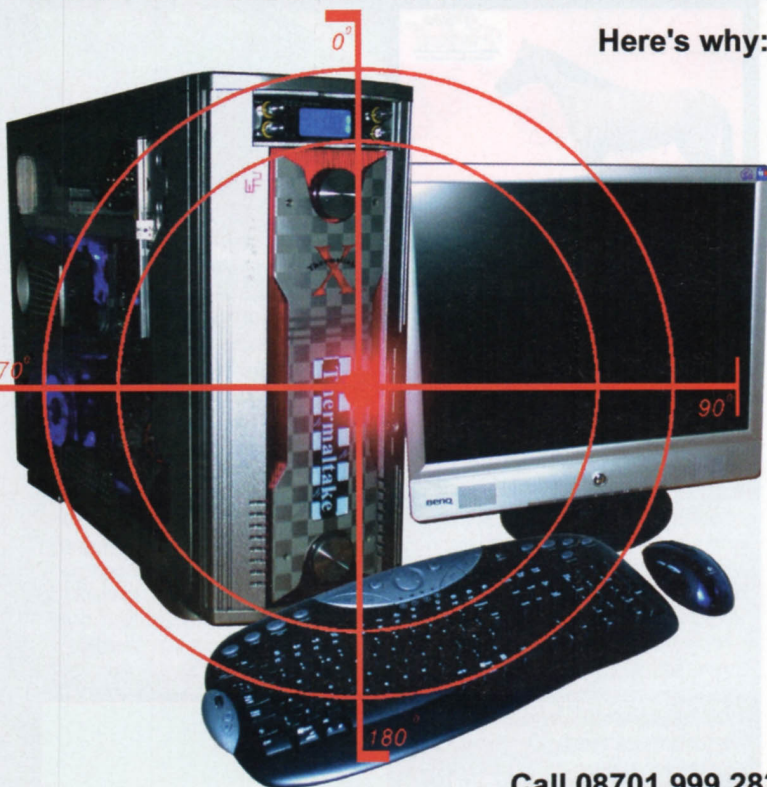
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Air Buccaneers is what would happen if Terry Gilliam made a mod.

Epic Battle



UT CREATORS ANNOUNCE WINNERS OF THE LEGENDARY 'MAKE SOMETHING UNREAL' COMP

MODS, MACHINIMA, mutators, maps and models all came under close scrutiny by the bods at Epic during the lengthy judging process of its 'Make Something Unreal' tournament – with all category winners getting a slice of the prize fund worth an amazing one million dollars.

The grand final, however, is now over – and the most important accolade of grand final winner has been given to *Red Orchestra*, an FPS mod based on the Eastern front of WWII, whose developer won \$50,000 in ready money and an official \$350,000 Unreal engine licence to use in the pursuit of gaining a publisher and turning its mod into a full retail product.

Seven downloads were announced as dwelling at the top of the modding tree, and all of them can be found on this month's DVD for your perusal. Behind *Red Orchestra*'s superb recreation of Russo-Germanic conflict and night-on perfect gameplay, came *Damnation* – an utterly bizarre single-player melding of steam-powered weapons and the Wild West that could have won on artwork alone. Third place was given to the wonderfully odd *Air Buccaneers* (a multiplayer mod that hits a note somewhere between *Teddy Ruxpin*, *The Adventures Of Baron Von Munchausen* and *Richard Branson*), and has players



Damnation: thrills and mecha-cowboy spills.



Red Orchestra, the contest winner, is a dazzling achievement.

exchanging blunderbuss fire between hot air balloons in the sky.

Coming in at the rear, meanwhile, were *Alien Swarm*, single-player puzzler *Metaball*, *Strike Force* and *Frag Ops* – as illustrious a list of recent mods as you could ever imagine. This is perhaps the first step for many of the winners along

the road to retail, so boot them up on our cover DVD and use and abuse them while they're still blissfully free. But that's not all – if you want the full list of winners and what they can do, you can find links and details at www.makesomethingunreal.com, so go and check it out.

COUNTRY PURSUITS



GIDDY UP WITH PIPPA FUNNELL: THE STUD FARM AND JOHN DEERE: AMERICAN OFFERING



Pippa Funnell and John Deere: keeping the yokel dream alive.

NICHE GAMES are truly a wonderful thing, and this month the pressing need for rural gaming is gaining two much-needed footholds. Despite initial worries of it being a non-work-safe title, *Pippa Funnell: The Stud Farm Inheritance* is a forthcoming Ubisoft game aimed at girls who can overlook the fact that horses are rubbish and do things like get scared of crisp bags stuck in hedges. Officially backed by notable equestrian Pippa Funnell herself, the game sees you (or at least your little sister) playing a member of Mrs Funnell's horsey team called Estelle – taking part in cross-country events and showjumping while doing all the grooming and poo removal that the beasts demand. Ponies are also fully customisable.

Meanwhile *John Deere: American Farmer*, a recreationally rural offering

available on import from the US alongside the National Rifle Association's *Varmint Hunter*, is a game built to showcase John Deere tractors, combine harvesters, cultivators and drills – which it does with aplomb. We contacted Charles Porter, chairman of the Beds and Hunts National Farming Union and Sheep Farmer of the Year 1986, to find out how important such titles were to the UK's agricultural industry. "Well it all helps, I suppose," he claimed – not really understanding the question. In other news, this month's lack of decent gaming activity has led to news editors scraping the bottom of many barrels.

■ Publisher: Ubisoft
 ■ Developer: Ubisoft
 ■ ETA: March
 ■ Website: www.ubi.com

Never turn your back on the enemy
– unless the man behind you is a Marine



You are the First to Fight – a US Marine on the front lines of urban combat in Beirut. Lead a 4-man fire team that executes authentic Marine tactics. Move aggressively, knowing your team gives you 360-degree security, and devastate your enemies with precise air and mortar attacks. Experience a first-person shooter so realistic, the Marines use it as a training tool.



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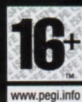
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Search For a Game



It's time to pick a winner as **PC ZONE's** very own talent contest comes to a close. Get those voting fingers ready!

WELCOME ONE and all to the grand final of Search For A Game! When we put the call out for game ideas 12 long months ago, we could barely have expected the deluge of entries that arrived on our doorsteps (and continue to arrive, it's over now, time to stop). Hundreds of hopefuls went through our rigorous screening process, then were whittled down to the 12

best and of those that went forward to be judged by our panel, only five were deemed worthy of acceptance.

But now it's over to you to pick our winner. The five finalists are lined up below, with a brief reminder of their excellence and what our judges thought. To vote for your favourite game, simply log on to the **PC ZONE** website at www.pczone.co.uk, navigate to

the **PC ZONE** chat forum and add your vote to the poll before Thursday, March 30. We'll tally the results and announce the winner in issue 155. Whichever game is deemed to be the peoples' champion will win its creator a state-of-the-art XFX NVIDIA GeForce FX5900 XT graphics card! Remember, every vote counts, so get clicking...

FRONTIER (ISSUE 142)

by Andrew 'Call Me Dave' Peters of Bolton



A Wild West RPG. Why has this never been done?

Morrowind meets *A Fistful Of Dollars* in this open-ended wild west RPG with massively multiplayer overtones. You can play as anything from a Native American to a dastardly outlaw, shooting up saloons, clearing up towns, gathering posses or just exploring the wild frontier lands. The only game to get a 'Hit' from all three judges, Ant enjoyed the exploration of an underused genre, Jamie admitted excitement, describing it as "*Dances With Morrowind*", but warning that it "depended on the implementation". Will was most taken though: "I think it's an absolutely brilliant idea", and calling the clan system "genius".



Imagine *Morrowind* with shooters.



Outlaws was the good western game.

CHAIN OF COMMAND (ISSUE 143)

by Craig Fleming of Waterlooville, Hampshire



C&C Generals and *Savage* make up the main elements.

C&C: Generals meets *Savage* in this RTS with a difference. Online strategy is the hook here, but with different levels of your forces all being commanded by other human players, following your orders while fighting the battles themselves. Jamie didn't think there was much appeal playing

below the Commander level, but Ant could see the gem below the flaw and recommended tightening the "interesting" design for it to work well. Will also thought getting enough players would be a problem, but argued that it's "a good idea that should be made".



Craig's own screenshot mock-ups helped visualise the concept.

ROCKETMAN CHRONICLES (ISSUE 145)

by Michael J Dowswell of New Galloway

Mafia meets *Splinter Cell* in this futuristic take on the free-roaming city genre. Multi-faceted stealth missions with varying paths tell the story of a robot city filled with hundreds of locations, vehicles and weapons. Michael included some evocative artwork with his idea, a factor that hit big with Will who was

completely won over. "For sheer artsy class I reckon it could be a winner." Ant was less enthused, calling the idea an "unholy hybrid mess" and bemoaned zero player appeal. However, Jamie thought it could be big, as long as Michael concentrated on the backdrop enough.



Imagine *Mafia* with robots.



Michael provided stunning artwork.



Missions are very *Splinter Cell* in nature.

JERSEY UNDER SIEGE (ISSUE 147)

by Stuart Prosser of Bath



PC ZONE's art team provided an inspired loading screen.



Midwinter is the basic concept.

Our art team enjoyed mocking up an impression of Jim Bergerac in a Nazi uniform for this *Midwinter* meets *Far Cry*-inspired action-adventure. Freeing Jersey from the German invaders during WWII is the order of the day, with the single goal of assassinating the German general spread across an accurately rendered map of the



Far Cry meets the Nazis.

British Isles. Favours for locals need to be performed to recruit them (and their skills) to the cause, something Will thought the game could do without, although Jamie and Ant both enjoyed that part. Will did think it was "one of the most original ideas we've had so far", while Jamie thought it "could be fantastic".

ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE! (ISSUE 150)

by Ross Pearson of parts unknown

The ever-popular zombie genre gets a taste of *GTA: Vice City*-style freedom in this gore-splattered fight for survival. The zombie infection dynamic is always varying, providing a tactical element to your search for freedom. A multiplayer game has both outbreak deathmatch, co-op survival modes, zombie massacring contests and zombie-controlling killing sprees. Jamie loved it: "Yay, yay and thrice yay! This is a cracking idea." Will compared it to upcoming zombie games, but thought it could still "capture the spirit and terror of *Dawn Of The Dead*. The strongest idea that we've covered so far!" Only Ant wasn't impressed, bemoaning the lack of originality in the subject matter.



It's hard to go wrong with zombies.



There they are then, the five ideas our judges thought the best. But now it's your turn to be heard, so get over to the forum at www.pczone.co.uk, get voting and leave your comments. We'll print the winners and the best of your thoughts in issue 155. Thanks to everyone who sent an entry and especially to our hopeful finalists. Good luck to all!



CHARTS

In association with **VIRGIN MEGASTORES**

They were all dead. The final gunshot was an exclamation mark on everything that had led to this point. I released my finger from the trigger, and it was over. Apart from these charts...

ChartTrack

TOP 10

ELSPA
Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association

In a chart of best-of-year big-hitters, Sports Interactive's *Football Manager* rules the roost. Can you hear the *Champ Man* sing? No! No! Can you hear the *Champ Man* sing, we can't hear a f**king thing. No-oo-oo-oo! Repeat to fade...



What's left to say about *Half-Life 2*? OK, apart from that we love the ringing noise you hear when you down Combine troops. And that bit in the mineshafts with all the headcrabs scuttling around. And Alyx's beautiful eyes. And her lovely tracksuit.

| | TITLE | PUBLISHER | SCORE |
|----|-------------------------------------|------------|-------|
| 1 | ▲ FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005 | SEGA | 90% |
| 2 | ▲ HALF-LIFE 2 | VU GAMES | 97% |
| 3 | ▼ THE SIMS 2 | EA | 82% |
| 4 | ▼ LOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH | EA | 91% |
| 5 | ▲ ROME: TOTAL WAR | ACTIVISION | 93% |
| 6 | ▲ VAMPIRE - BLOODLINES | ACTIVISION | 86% |
| 7 | - FAR CRY | UBISOFT | 93% |
| 8 | ▼ MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT | EA | 79% |
| 9 | ▼ ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3 | ATARI | 79% |
| 10 | - DOOM 3 | ACTIVISION | 90% |



No doubt helped by the free publicity garnered by the new series of *Time Commanders*, *Rome: Total War* is still dazzling left, right and centre. It may not have teams of shouting vicars, or even Richard Hammond, but it's still the pinnacle of strategy.



In a bit of a resurgence for the Carver dynasty, *Far Cry* reappears at No.7. It'll be a while before we hear about Crytek's next project, so for now if you haven't sampled the second greatest shooter of last year, you're fast running out of excuses to avoid it.

YOUR SHOUT

Have your say at www.pczone.co.uk

Well at least it's a chart serious gamers can be proud of and shows that, for the time being, we're a little spoilt for choice for innovative and polished titles.

PawsofEvil

Vampire only a PC ZONE essential? Pah! It's a classic even with the bugs! Except that one that doesn't let you finish it...

Frosty440

Meh.
Jason_6780

TOP 10

| | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. CITY OF HEROES | NCSOFT |
| 2. MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT | EA |
| 3. ZOO TYCOON 2 | MICROSOFT |
| 4. SID MEIER'S PIRATES! | ATARI |
| 5. ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3 | ATARI |
| 6. AGE OF MYTHOLOGY GOLD EDITION | MICROSOFT |
| 7. FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005 | SEGA |
| 8. DOOM 3 | ACTIVISION |
| 9. DARK AGE OF CAMELOT | HIP INTERACTIVE |
| 10. THE SIMS 2 | EA |

COMPETITION

Win £100 of Virgin vouchers!

PC ZONE and Virgin have teamed up to give you the chance to win 100 shiny pounds-worth of goodies from your local Virgin Megastore. All you have to do to enter is answer the following:

QUESTION: Who sang the lines: "I Can Be Your Hero Baby, I Can Kiss Away The Pain"?

A Ricky Martin
B Julio Iglesias
C Enrique Iglesias

Send your answers on a postcard to: PC ZONE Chart Compo Issue 153, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP. Closing date: March 30, 2005

- Please include your name, address, daytime phone number, email address, job title and company name (and age if under 18).
- Please tell us if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers or new products from other companies.
- Please indicate whether you are a current subscriber to PC ZONE.

For general competition terms and conditions, turn to page 7.

INCOMING!

PC ZONE'S RELEASE SCHEDULE FOR THE NEXT FEW MONTHS. ALL APPROXIMATE MONTHLY DATES ARE CORRECT AT THE TIME OF GOING TO PRESS.

MARCH

| | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| ACT OF WAR: DIRECT ACTION | ATARI |
| BROTHERS IN ARMS | UBISOFT |
| COLD FEAR | UBISOFT |
| CONSTANTINE | SCI |
| DARWINIA | INTROVERSION SOFTWARE |
| KOTOR II: THE SITH LORDS | ACTIVISION |
| PLAYBOY: THE MANSION | UBISOFT |
| PROJECT: SNOWBLIND | EIDOS |
| PSYCHOTOXIC | WHIPTAIL |
| STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO | ACTIVISION |
| STOLEN | HIP INTERACTIVE |
| STREET RACING SYNDICATE | HIP INTERACTIVE |
| THE BARD'S TALE | UBISOFT |
| THE PUNISHER | THQ |

APRIL

| | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| CLOSE COMBAT: FIRST TO FIGHT | GLOBAL STAR |
| COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WAR | CDV |
| EMPIRE EARTH II | VU GAMES |
| FREEDOM FORCE VS THE THIRD REICH | DIGITAL JESTERS |
| LEGO STAR WARS | EIDOS |
| PARIAH | HIP INTERACTIVE |
| STRONGHOLD 2 | GLOBAL STAR |
| TRACKMANIA: SUNRISE | DIGITAL JESTERS |
| SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY | UBISOFT |
| SWAT 4 | VU GAMES |
| VIVISECTOR: BEAST INSIDE | BRIGADES |
| X2: THE RETURN | DEEP SILVER |

MAY

| | |
|------------------------------|-------------|
| DOOM 3: RESURRECTION OF EVIL | ACTIVISION |
| EARTH 2160 | DEEP SILVER |
| HEART OF EMPIRE | DEEP SILVER |

JUNE

| | |
|-------------------------------|----------|
| BATTLEFIELD 2 | EA |
| F.E.A.R. | VU GAMES |
| GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS | ROCKSTAR |

Q1 2005

| | |
|--|----------|
| BOILING POINT | ATARI |
| CALL OF CTHULHU: DARK CORNERS OF THE EARTH | BETHESDA |
| DRAGONSHARD | ATARI |
| HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY | EIDOS |
| IMPERIAL GLORY | EIDOS |
| THE MATRIX ONLINE | SEGA/WB |

Q2 2005

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|
| BATTLESTATIONS: MIDWAY | SCI |
| BET ON SOLDIER | DIGITAL JESTERS |
| CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 5 | EIDOS |
| COMMANDOS STRIKE FORCE | EIDOS |
| EARTH 2160 | DEEP SILVER |
| MOTOGP: ULTIMATE RACING TECHNOLOGY 3 | THQ |

Q3 2005

| | |
|--------------------------------|------------|
| CONFLICT: GLOBAL TERROR | SCI |
| DREAMFALL: THE LONGEST JOURNEY | FUNCOM |
| PSYCHONAUTS | TBA |
| STARSHIP TROOPERS | EMPIRE |
| STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR | ACTIVISION |
| TIMESHIFT | ATARI |

Q4 2005

| | |
|--------------------|-----------|
| AGE OF EMPIRES III | MICROSOFT |
|--------------------|-----------|

2005

| | |
|------------------------------|------------|
| ADVENT RISING | VU GAMES |
| BIOSHOCK | TBA |
| BLACK & WHITE 2 | EA |
| DUNGEON SIEGE II | MICROSOFT |
| KING KONG | UBISOFT |
| MIDDLE-EARTH ONLINE | VU GAMES |
| QUAKE IV | ACTIVISION |
| STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL | THQ |
| STUBBS THE ZOMBIE | ASPYP |
| THE MOVIES | ACTIVISION |

MISSING IN ACTION

The war's not over until the last game comes home...

VIVISECTOR

Russian and Eastern European games are slippery buggers and Vivisector is the very worst offender, having slipped a gazillion times already. We're assured that this will be the last stumble for the kitten-cruncher – and we almost believe it...

- Publisher: Brigades
- Developer: Action Forms
- ETA: April
- Website: www.vivisector.com



STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL

We'd been getting the vibe that *STALKER*'s expansive gameplay needed some tying down before it got its optimistic May release, and now the vibe is a big, ugly slip. End of the year? Start of the next? Who knows – but the *ZONE* monkey is rocking in his cage and shaking his head. And that's a bad sign.

- Publisher: THQ
- Developer: GSC Gameworld
- ETA: A mystery
- Website: www.stalker-game.com/



BATTLEFIELD 2

As is the fashion today, the revelation of a *Battlefield 2* slip was released among a load of fiscal nonsense and money talk. June is now the estimated release for the new multiplayer revolution, so keep mooching in 1942 or *Desert Combat* until then.

- Publisher: EA
- Developer: DICE
- ETA: June
- Website: www.eagames.com



TOP 10 THINGS THAT NPC ENEMIES CONSTANTLY SAY BEFORE YOU KILL THEM

1. "IT'S PAYNE!"
(VARIOUS GOONS IN THE ORIGINAL MAX PAYNE, PRE-DEATH)
2. "THEY'RE EVERYWHERE!"
(THE SWEET LITTLE COMEDY GRUNTS IN HALO, PRE-DEATH)
3. "DO YOU LIKE THEM APPLES?"
(FAR CRY MERCENARIES ENQUIRE ABOUT TASTY FRUIT, PRE-DEATH)
4. "HUWUH?"
(MGS GRUNTS BEFORE THEY SEE IT'S 'JUST A BOX', PRE-DEATH)
5. "ALARM! ALARM!"
(ANY NAZI, IN ANY GAME, HAVING SEEN AN ENEMY, PRE-DEATH)
6. "WE'VE GOT HOSTILES!"
(HALF-LIFE MARINES, PRE-DEATH)
7. "UNGA-BUNGA-BEEBY-BABO"
(ANY TWI'LEK AT ANY TIME IN KOTOR)
8. "I'LL BITE YOUR KNEECAPS OFF!"
(HALO CUTIES GET ANOTHER MENTION, PRE-DEATH)
9. "REBEL SCUM!"
(NASTY IMPERIALS HAVE BEEN WATCHING TOO MUCH ROTJ, PRE-DEATH)
10. "GET HIM!"
(EVERY ENEMY IN EVERY GAME EVER MADE, PRE-DEATH)

IS THERE A GAMING CHART YOU'D LIKE TO SEE HERE? SEND IT IN AND IF WE PRINT IT, YOU'LL GET A PC ZONE GOODIE BAG!



F.E.A.R.

High-kicks, chop-socky, big guns and slo-mo kills abound in *F.E.A.R.* multiplayer shenanigans

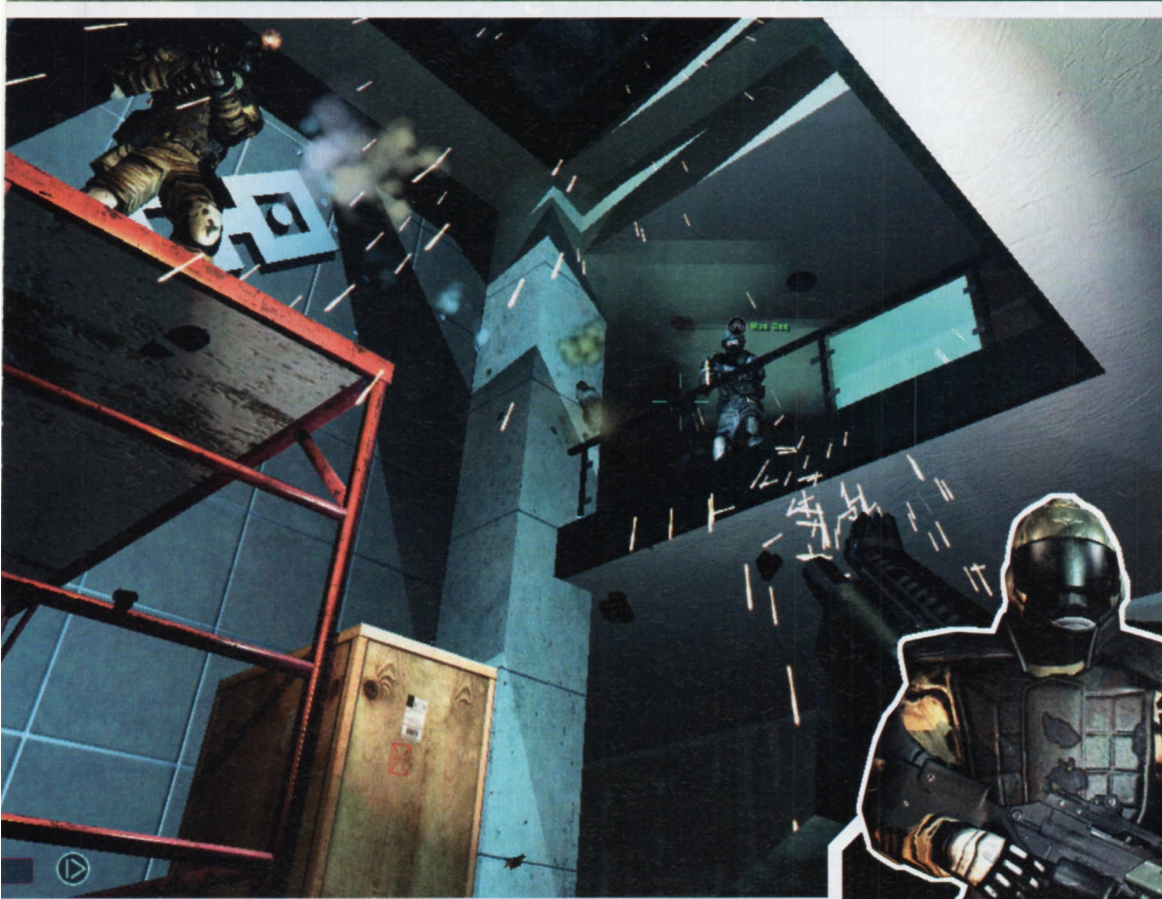
MOD EXPERIMENTATION aside, bullet-time has never been integrated into your common or garden deathmatch – despite what high-pings and shit graphics cards might have suggested in the past. *F.E.A.R.* is set to redress the balance, albeit in limited doses.

Obviously a situation in which everyone is flailing around as if trapped in transparent treacle has to be avoided when introducing slo-mo to team deathmatch, and *F.E.A.R.* does this by having 'hyper-sensitivity'™ available as a collectable power-up. Grab it, and once you've waited for it to charge up, you can spread the slo-mo love to all your compadres – with everyone kicking out with melee attacks, shooting and dodging bullets while hapless enemies flounder around in their now redundant time-stream.

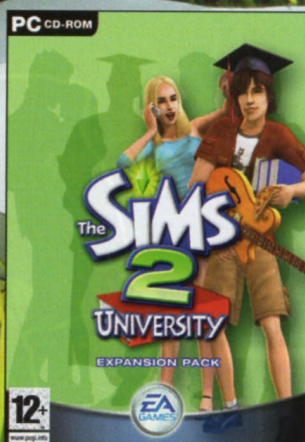
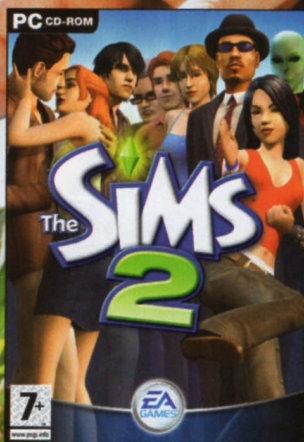
Neat weapons on show here include a nail-gun which can pin enemies to walls (something of a Monolith trademark after *NOLF2* and *AvP2*), a plasma gun, a pleasantly weighty shotgun and the ever-present rocket launcher. The beautiful screens you see here, meanwhile, are plucked from deathmatch levels set in docks, offices, slums and construction yards. Whether or not you can play as a scary child is yet to be confirmed...

■ **Publisher:** VU Games
■ **Developer:** Monolith
■ **ETA:** June
■ **Website:** www.lith.com





How will you spend your time at college?

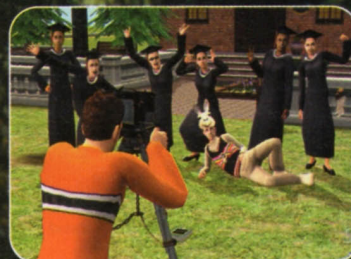


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How will you play with life?



Challenge Everything™

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There are many emotional highs to be had as a PC games-player – the anticipation of hearing the dull thud as your pre-ordered copy of *Half-Life 2* comes through the mailbox, the satisfaction of ripping through the cellophane wrapping and hearing the clunk as you pop open the DVD case for the first time, the inebriation when you sniff the newly printed manual and see the words ‘Installation complete, would you like to run the

game?’ appear on your screen.

All giddy peaks that are rarely equalled with other entertainment media. But what of those game-specific moments of excellence that make up the very essence of being a gaming fan in this modern age? Obviously there are many personal moments of brilliance that live with us all our lives, but here at **ZONE** we’ve decided to collate the top 50 gaming moments that no games enthusiast worth their salt should have missed...



WARNING!

The following feature contains many spoilers for most of your favourite PC games, so if you don't want vital plot points ruined for you, don't read on. You have been warned!

50 LITTLE BIG ADVENTURE

Escape into Funrock's Dictatorship

You've just purchased a game that appears surprisingly heavy on the elephants. Everything is big, bouncy and colourful. Yet you're in a straitjacket, your wife has been kidnapped, you're surrounded by menacing guards and teleport-panels that can call in crack Dumbo-troops at any sign of a security breach. The opening level of *Little Big Adventure* is a supreme example of juxtaposition and contrast – showing you that there's something very rotten in the state of Twinsun, and that life under the totalitarian regime of Funrock isn't going to be much fun at all. Easily one of the most imaginative gaming environments of all time.



49 PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

Stealing a kiss at the end of the game

A wonderful game, but also one brilliantly summed up in one beautifully set up, and surprisingly bitter-sweet gag at its very close. After hours of play and banter with the charming Farah, time-trickery has removed the entire romance from her memory – so when the game's closing sequence plays, the Prince's expected full-on snog is met with outright anger. Fundamentally rumbled, he eyes the dagger of time and flips the time-stream back a few minutes so that he can dash away from Farah as an attractive man of mystery rather than the illicit groper he had appeared to be. The game ends, and you're left with a charmed half-smile that doesn't fade for hours.



48 PUZZLE BOBBLE

Playing until the wee small hours

The best fast-paced puzzle game ever released on PC, it may not push your rig to its very limits but it has remained the perfect vehicle for reaching a Zen-like status of perfect integration with the machinations of your monitor. Recently challenged by the talents of *Zookeeper*, *Puzzle Bobble* is a game that both plagues your life and makes it a fundamentally better experience.



47 DUNGEON MASTER

For the old school

If you can, cast your mind back to the swirling mists of time that was 1989. Back then, FTL had just converted its Atari ST release of *Dungeon Master* to DOS. Among its selling points were a newly-touted 3D view (in fact, it was the first RPG to feature this), and the use of mouse-based combat. Before this ground-breaking beauty came along, if you fancied a spot of monster-bashing you'd have been limited to text-based adventuring and the only graphics in sight were courtesy of a teletext-style image for each room. Any self-respecting role-playing fan who thinks they know their stuff should experience this, the forerunner of the modern RPG.



45 LEMMINGS

Oh no!

Not many puzzle games manage to blend fast-paced clickery and mind-bending problems with insane ultra-violence. *Lemmings* did though, managing to pack unheard levels of ghoulishness into tiny amounts of pixels – both with lemmings falling



46



Emotional manipulation at its best.

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

The destruction of the lighthouse

It's not often that a game makes grown men go mushy, but the scene in *Beyond Good & Evil* in which Jade's home is destroyed by the Domz, the orphans are kidnapped and she only has her loyal Woolf for consolation tugs on the heart-strings like no other. You rarely see a game hero looking genuinely broken, yet this is only one of a hundred different moments from the vastly overlooked French adventure that we could have picked. If you haven't played it, then get it now. Right now.



from great heights and being mangled by a variety of cunningly engineered death-traps. The highlight, however, was the terrified cry of "Oh No!" that emanated from your 386 when you realised that you'd bollocksed it all up and tapped the self-destruct button. A hundred little timers appeared on a hundred little heads, all counting down to the inevitable. We've said it before and we'll say it again: bwahahahaha!

44 DIABLO

Sheer gameplay

With its sublimely repetitive and hideously addictive gameplay, this is the hack'n'slash that spawned a hundred wannabes. The *Diablo* games



appeal unashamedly to the animal instincts in all of us: kill, grab, kill, grab. The sequel includes some sweet cut-scenes and a whole lot more things to kill and grab. Plus, it's still heavily played online. We've almost lost partners due to continuous playing.



43 ALONE IN THE DARK

That thing jumping through the window

Yes, yes. Once upon a time this was scary. Extremely scary. We know you won't believe us, but the first titles in the *AITD* series truly mingled gameplay with horror in a fashion that built up to the shit-stirrers of today. *AvP2* and *Thief* would be nothing without it.

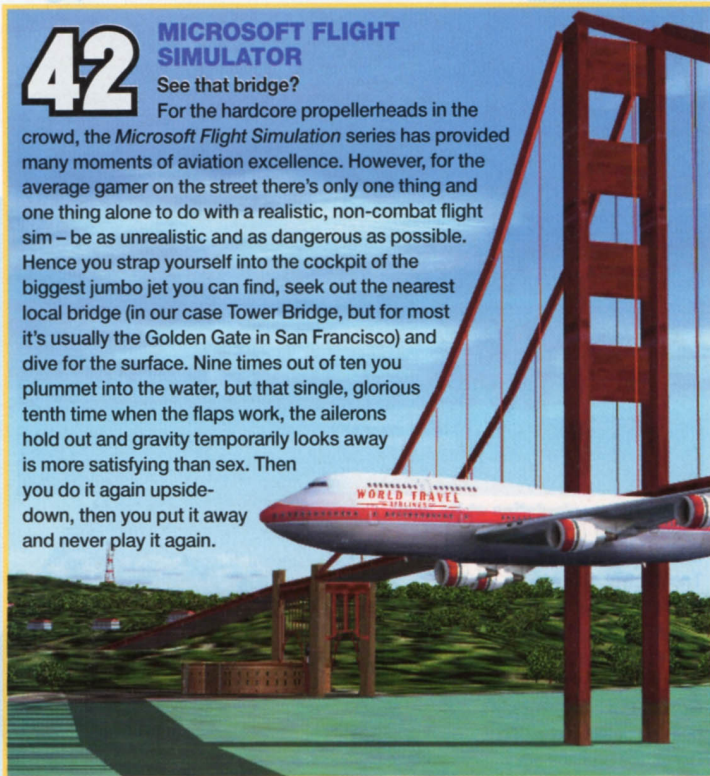
"It's not often a game makes grown men go mushy, but parts of *Beyond Good & Evil* tugs on the heart-strings"

42

MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR

See that bridge?

For the hardcore propellerheads in the crowd, the *Microsoft Flight Simulation* series has provided many moments of aviation excellence. However, for the average gamer on the street there's only one thing and one thing alone to do with a realistic, non-combat flight sim – be as unrealistic and as dangerous as possible. Hence you strap yourself into the cockpit of the biggest jumbo jet you can find, seek out the nearest local bridge (in our case Tower Bridge, but for most it's usually the Golden Gate in San Francisco) and dive for the surface. Nine times out of ten you plummet into the water, but that single, glorious tenth time when the flaps work, the ailerons hold out and gravity temporarily looks away is more satisfying than sex. Then you do it again upside-down, then you put it away and never play it again.



41 SIM CITY 2000

What is done, must be undone

You've built up a city to be proud of. A fine model of efficiency, intelligent road planning and fiscal majesty. Happy sims drive around free of cares, worries or the spectre of unemployment. So what happens now? Burn it! Shake the foundations it lies on! Make the people riot! Call in an alien invasion! Watch the emergency services struggle to cope with the terrifying scale of the wrath of God himself – or at least the disasters available to you on your task bar. One more time: bwahahahaha!

39 NO ONE LIVES FOREVER

Jumping from a plane without a parachute. Brilliant!

Dave Woods may not have liked it, but the 1960s-influenced spy shooter *NOLF* provides a must-play moment – when the



swiftest secret agent Cate Archer escapes from a crashing plane. During the sequence (ripped straight from the James Bond film *Moonraker*), you discover from two arguing henchmen that the only parachute has been taken by a third heavy already on his way out of the aircraft. Killing the two men, you run towards the exit when the plane explodes, sending you and the remaining henchman hurtling towards earth. As you fall, you must avoid a couple of psychotic paratroopers from above, while catching up with the baddie and nicking his parachute before you decorate terra-firma with human paté.



38 OPERATION FLASHPOINT

"They're all dead..."

Operation Flashpoint was one of the most ambitious games ever created. A total battlefield FPS, with control of foot soldiers, tanks, jeeps, planes, helicopters – the lot. In many ways the Czech developer, Bohemia Interactive, had bitten off a little more than it could chew, and the shoddy presentation put a lot of people off what was a classic game. But if you preserved, you experienced some of the best modern war scenarios ever, with squad battles to rival anything and a sense of real attachment to your team-mates. Which made it all the more galling when, in the most memorable level, you found your entire team wiped out in a forest ambush and you were left to evade capture by the Russian forces. It was edge-of-the-seat tension, with every noise making you jump and every waving bush on the horizon a potential enemy soldier advancing on your hiding place.



garand. A sound that's both satisfying and distinctly unnerving at the same time (due to your sudden battle impotency while you're reloading), it just sums up all the reasons we love *Call Of Duty* so much.



36 THE ELDER-SCROLLS: MORROWIND

Up, up and away

Not knowing what awaits you on the vast island of Vvardenfell, you make your first tentative steps into the swamplands surrounding Seyda Neen, only to hear a piercing scream from the skies, followed by the noise a mage makes when he hits the ground at high speed. Investigating the corpse reveals a journal describing his endeavours to create an alternative to flying spells, and how he'll shame his mocking peers with his ability to leap great distances, covering many miles in a single bound. Gravity brought him back down to earth with all the grace of a parachuting elephant however, delivering to you the three remaining scrolls of Icarian Flight. You have to laugh, until you try the scroll for yourself and disappear into the heavens.



37 CALL OF DUTY

All the small things

Life has many simple pleasures: buy one get one free offers, newspapers left on bus seats, bubble wrap. This is why the moment we've chosen from *Call Of Duty*, the most exhilarating and breathless war shooter of all time, is such a subtle one. Before the current crop of war shooters, sound effects had been mostly an afterthought, but *Call Of Duty* changed that with the 'ping' of an empty



Better than World Of Leather. Just.



An early eBay prototype?

40

DUKE NUKEM 3D

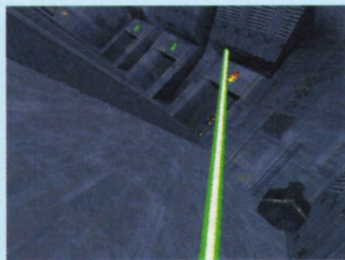
Being really, really rude

It was a game that did so many things right, but what it did the best was make you feel like a naughty kid flicking through his older brother's secret stash of *Sunday Sports*. Going into sex shops and entering booths replete with porn-monitors and Kleenex-stuffed dustbins (and a rocket launcher), giving strippers money and asking them to 'shake it baby' or simply catching an alien on the bog – it all gave you a peculiarly 'Benny Hill' sense of naughtiness unmatched by any *Leisure Suit Larry* or *Lula* since. We miss you Duke – come back soon, won't you?



35 SYSTEM SHOCK 2

Hunted, with next to no bullets
Entering the engineering storage level and going out on a limb with little to no ammo is still a seminal gaming moment for us. Even on medium difficulty, the game gives so little ammo that you struggle to believe you'll make it through a relentless gauntlet of suicidal robots, shotgun-wielding zombies and telekinetic monkeys. A recent play only confirmed that it could provoke the shitting of major-sized bricks (again). Another contender, meanwhile, is meeting Shodan inside a bizarre moving room – a classic gaming moment.



34 JEDI KNIGHT: DARK FORCES II

Run for your life

One of the most frequent office discussions around here is about favourite game levels and whenever it occurs, one game crops up with almost alarming regularity – *Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II*. We're talking The Falling Ship and it comes at a pivotal moment in the game. You've just had to choose between pursuing the dark or light side of the force and you being left on a slowly crashing space craft. The level is unique in that as you progress through, the damn thing is constantly rotating and tumbling, forcing you to continually adjust your perspective, something previously unheard of in 3D gaming. Add the race against time factor and you've got one of the most tense FPS levels ever designed.



33 FINAL FANTASY VII

The death of Aeris
Amazingly, games are only just starting to cotton on to the fact that an engrossing story and believable characters can

transform a mediocre experience into an utterly captivating one. *Final Fantasy VII* might be a great RPG, but even its most ardent fan would find it hard to deny it's all in the story. Especially if you're a man. And especially if you fall in love with Aeris. Her dramatic and completely unexpected death brought a tear to the eyes of a couple of the ZONE staff and provided the ammunition to finish the game and kill Sephiroth, the perpetrator of one of the worst acts in videogame history.



32 FALLOUT 2

Three's a crowd

So many *Fallout 2* anecdotes to choose from. Fluffing in the porn studios and getting poisoned by the man juice? Getting forced into a shotgun wedding by an angry father who has just caught you in flagrante with his cherished daughter? No, top of the tree in post-apocalyptic wasteland is when you meet the charming mobster Bishop and his family. Bishop may have been the paymaster, but that didn't stop you sneaking past him when leaving the bedrooms of his wife (from whom you could nick jewellery after you'd shagged her) and his rebellious daughter (who, if memory serves, was a bit of a go-er). A hilarious situation only compounded by the fact that you're told when you finish the game that both mother and daughter went on to simultaneously have children who bear an uncanny similarity to your good self.

30 HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED

The arrival of the Flood

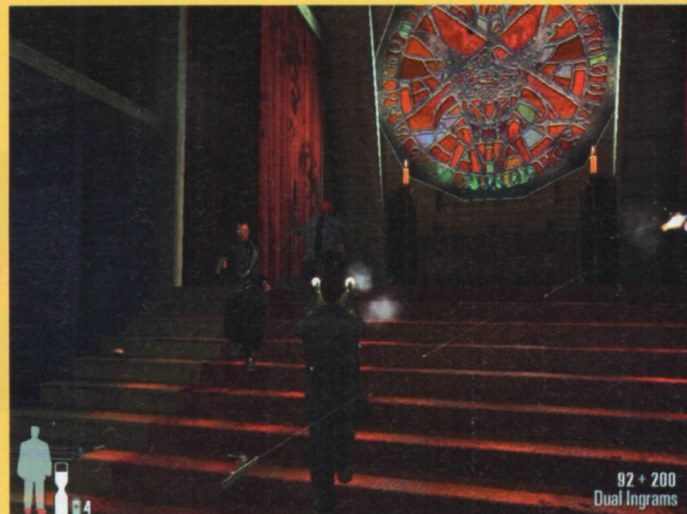
Master Chief makes his way through a base on *Halo* that has obviously seen a major catastrophic battle. A surviving human soldier, fear in his eyes, is babbling incoherently and shooting invisible demons. Covenant aliens – the major enemies up to this point in the game – are lying dead and dismembered in their dozens. You reach down and pick up a fallen comrade's helmet and watch footage of a terrifying new alien force rip



31 MAX PAYNE

"The Blood of Fallen Angels"

The single greatest moment of the original game and sequel combined, the face-off against Jack Lupino stands out because of its brilliantly scripted, and quite frankly disturbing, build-up. Dark, twisted, overblown and with a superb battle against the rabid mobster, the cries of "Mythic wolves let loose to devour the sun and the moon. Lupino is the wolf! I'm Mr Beast, the big bad Fenris wolf! I'm The-End-of-the-World-Man, wearing the flesh of fallen angels!" Righteous bullet-time has never tasted so sweet.



Dark, gritty and utterly brilliant.



28 THEME PARK

Sending punters flying

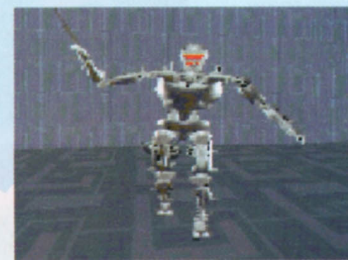
It's hard to play the old Bullfrog games in anything but super fast-forward now, but a fiddle with DOSBox should get the old classics running. Great *Theme Park* moments are many, but beyond the handyman wiping up the sick that had been spilled next to the new gut-twisting rollercoaster you'd just designed, and your long-suffering engineer receiving a call, packing away his picnic and going to repair stuff, it was just sheer joy to see plebs hurled off rides and up into your monitor. Bliss.



27 DARK FORCES

The introduction of the Dark Troopers

Our favourite must-play sequence of LucasArts' superb *Doom* clone *Dark Forces* is when your character of Kyle Katarn first encounters the deadly Imperial Dark Trooper on level five, set in the Gromos mines. A cold, distorted robot voice, followed by the sound of clanking gears and whirring mechanics is the frightening indication that a Phase One Dark Trooper has spotted you and is hunting you down, *Terminator*-style. As you flee, panic-ridden, down a maze of claustrophobic conduits and tunnels, the Dark Trooper follows, slashing at you with arms made of deadly sharp blades. Absolutely terrifying.



CATEGORIES PICK A CATEGORY

The Mooer

- 1 Immortal Footwear
- 2 There's No Such Thing as an Easy Question
- 3 Round the World with Simon Le Bon

29 YOU DON'T KNOW JACK

Jack attack

The single greatest quiz experience – not only on the PC, but also in the whole realm of human experience. A genuinely funny, rarely self-repeating quiz that had a UK version brilliantly voiced by Paul Kaye and a raft of comedic voice talent. Why should you care? Why because it's the funniest, best-conceived and (with select friends) the most social experience your 'puter could ever provide.

"What about fluffing in porn studios and getting poisoned by man juice?"

26

QUAKE

"Shit! Shambler! Run!"

"I bet if you went back and played *Quake*, the Shambler wouldn't be as scary as he seems now,"

laughed Tim Willetts of id software when *ZONE* brought the monolithic sloth beast up in conversation a few months back. Only then conceding that: "Yeah, yeah. He was a cool monster," after your correspondent had done a flailing, yet ample, bodily impression of its terrifying arm-smash and electric beam attacks. In its day the king of all shooter beasts, an encounter with a Shambler was the birth of 3D shooter gaming.



25 INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE

A leap of faith

The second best adventure game ever produced from the LucasFilm stable (although many would argue *Fate Of Atlantis* was better – they're wrong), *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade* took the basic plot of the film and created one of the best game conversions ever. It's a testament to how well Hal Barwood interpreted the film's story that elements continued to pop up in other Lucas games ever since ("Hi, I'm selling these fine leather jackets" being the most perennial). But the best moment comes near the end as Indy faces a gaping chasm to get to the grail. The film's magnificent 'hidden' path could never be recreated with the visual technology of the time, so instead simplicity ruled. As puzzles go, few have ever been better realised.

24 SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

Shooting people's limbs off

Soldier Of Fortune II remains one of PC *ZONE*'s favourite ever shooters, but it was mercenary John Mullins' first adventure that introduced gamers to the infamous 18-rated 'gore zones'. Developer Raven decided to create enemy characters with

detailed bodies that you could mutilate by shooting off limbs, shotgun-blasting heads, hacking at torsos with a knife and all manner of ultra-violent attacks. *Soldier Of Fortune* manages to both shock and cause huge hilarity, spawning numerous sick unofficial challenges in the *ZONE* office, including how fast you could remove all the enemies' arms, legs and heads in a particular level. Happy times.



22 CITY OF HEROES

Red, no blue... No red

MMOGs can be responsible for many esteemed moments of gaming greatness, as well as many more hours of boring tedium as you trudge your way through the level grind. So for an MMOG to reduce the essence to sheer balls-out fun is a breath of fresh air, and for all its faults, *City Of Heroes* does just that. This is a fact set up right at the start with the stunningly involving character creation system. Eschewing all that nonsense with numbers, stats and so on, this is all about presentation. Skin-tight lycra? Combat boots and a hood? Garish stars on your chest or muted techno camouflage? You can spend hours just tweaking your super-powered hero's visual attire through the millions of permutations on offer, and that's before you even get to pick the powers and choose a name. Practically a game in itself.



21 DUNGEON KEEPER 2

Managing your workforce

Bullfrog was really on a roll when this came out. It already had several *Populous* games, *Theme Park*, *Theme Hospital* and a fistful of other splendid titles under its belt and had well and truly cornered the market when it came to slightly wacky building sims. But the *Dungeon Keeper* series really typified everything that the Bullfrog games stood for. First, it put you in the

23

FAR CRY

The Dawn battle

You've been trapped indoors for longer than you want to remember. You want to taste that sweet Micronesian air again, you want to leap from tree to tree, you want to snipe with gay abandon. Then, all of a sudden, you're outside and dawn isn't too far away from breaking. A Trigen leaps 30ft into the fort you're standing atop, then you notice the mercs on the machine guns, then you see the Fat Boys marching into the compound, then you realise all-out war has broken out. There's a HumVee down the stairs. Run Jack, Run.

unlikely position of playing the bad guy. Second, it was imbued with a brilliant sense of humour, from the sight of leather-clad mistresses dragging fairies off to the torture chamber, to the James Earl Jones meets Tim-Curry-in-*Legend* hybrid voiceover that spouted both useful and obscure comments including: "Your creatures want cable", and "Your dungeon is full of yogurt".

20 CIVILIZATION

Have diplomat.

Will steal technology.

He was such a polite little chap, with top hat and briefcase, but in essence he was a dirty little rat. Create an embassy our collective arse! We want to steal the secret of gunpowder, and my little bloke's going to sneak it out right under your stupid nose! Stupid bloody aztecs! You'll never take Glasgow!

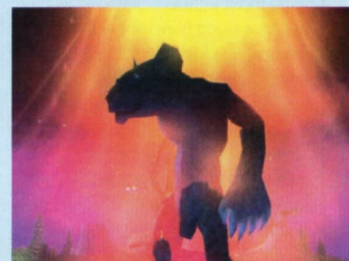


19 BLACK & WHITE

Sadists 'r' us

Black & White is a flawed game, no-one's doubting that for a second. Genius concept, debatable execution. But for the truly creative types out there,

it can be an adventure playground worthy of the Marquis de Sade himself. Quite apart from slapping your giant monkey creature around and forcing him to dump (literally) all over your quaking civilians, we were alerted to one particularly gruesome trick by a friend and we've never been the same since. Simply, you set up a breeding factory by dropping a couple of happy shaggers next to each other, then, with an evil creature fully prepped, build a shrine next door and watch maniacally as a steady stream of babies are produced, then ritually slaughtered. Then seek help.



18 PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

The character(s) is key

This is at the top of so many RPG players' 'favourites' list that it's a wonder it didn't sell better at the time. *Planescape: Torment* may have taken a lot of RPG clichés and used the traditional D&D model, but it managed to give them a suitable little twist to the left that made the game feel fresh and interesting, and it still feels that way even to this day. You may not have had a great many characters to



choose from for your little RPG party, but the ones that were there felt real because they were flawed and soiled by life, and consequently this made them easy to love. The dialogues and explanatory text was rather over-long, but at least they were interesting to read, albeit incredibly weird at times – just how the *Forgotten Realms* should be. In our opinion, this is one of the best RPGs ever made. Don't argue, just play it!



17 GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY

That Don Johnson feeling

We may have been late to the *Vice City* party on PC, but it was certainly worth the wait. Many moments of gaming class stand out in this flashback to the crime-filled streets of the '80s – taking to the skies in the helicopter, photographing Candi Suxx, discovering the 'prostitute refund method'... However for us, the true highlight simply grew organically out of the engine's various mechanics. You're cruising along the beachfront on your PCJ-600, the sunset is casting everything in a reddish hue, a light splattering of rain starts to fall and then, completing the moment, *Crockett's Theme* starts playing on Emotion 98.3. And you're there. Completely. Perfect.

16 SAM AND MAX HIT THE ROAD

All of it

Sam: Well, that was a pleasantly understated credits sequence.



Max: I enjoyed the cheesy retro ambience myself.
Sam: What the hell are you talking about, Max?
Max: Sam, either termites are burrowing through my skull, or one of us is ticking.
Sam: Ooops, oh yeah.
(Sam pulls out the head of a scientist recovered during the intro sequence. It's also a bomb).
Sam: Max, where should I put this so it doesn't hurt anyone we know or care about?
Max: Out the window, Sam. There's nothing but strangers out there.



15 COUNTER-STRIKE

Seeing all your comrades die in *de_dust*, then winning as a lone wolf
Self explanatory really, and resolutely rare as well. The knowledge that so many strangers are watching as you single-handedly win them their next round's weapons with a dashing mix of luck, skill and resolve is a hard one to beat. Never have so many been 'pwned' by so few.



14 PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4

Scoring a goal

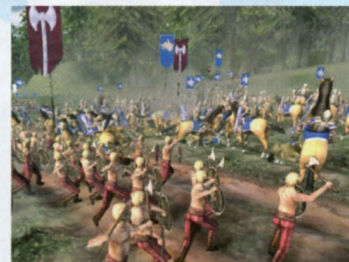
If you've seen the secret filming of Woods & Sefton playing *PES4* in the *ZONE* office on the discs, you'll understand why this is one of our 50 great gaming moments. Konami's superb footie game is the ultimate arcade kickabout, with nothing else – apart from maybe *Sensible Soccer* on the Amiga – coming close to creating a passionate, believable, utterly addictive realisation of the beautiful game. When you, for example, rattle the back of the net with an overhead kick in the last minute of a cup final, or lob the keeper with a beautiful chipped goal to win the league in the last match of the season, it's just pure gaming elation.



13 PLANETSIDE

At my signal, unleash hell
The bridge looks quiet. There's no sign of movement. You turn and face your troops. A phalanx of tanks, bombers, MAX armour and infantry, all controlled by fellow humans starts to rumble forward and the invasion begins. The enemy soon gets wind and races for the far side of the bridge

to head you off. Someone fires a shot and suddenly it all kicks off: bombs, bullets, missiles, lashers – hell on Earth. Or Auraxis anyhow. Many games do large-scale warfare, but what makes the *PlanetSide* experience so engaging and memorable is that every other participant is a living, breathing human. Awesome.



12 ROME: TOTAL WAR

Vanquishing the enemy

There are few finer sights in film than watching one large army of warriors rushing headfirst into another (at least if you're a man), and no game recreates this better than *Rome: Total War*. Your elephants stand atop the incline as the enemy troops below quake at their impending doom. You charge. You vanquish your foe. History is made. You go home, have an orgy and eat dormice. War can be glorious.

11 CARMAGEDDON

Driving off very big buildings

A 'sandbox' game years before its time, you could start up a game of *Carmageddon* and have no idea where it was going to take you. Exploration, violence, car-wrecks or racing (if you were a bit simple) were all on the cards. *Carmageddon* gave gamers their first real taste of freedom, and this is nowhere better expressed than the hours we spent driving to the top of goliath sky-scrappers and boosting ourselves into the cosmos towards our ultimate rack and ruin.



9 TOMB RAIDER

The Lost Valley

Picture the scene. You're strolling through lush vegetation, waterfalls to the left, rocky outcrops to the right. And then, before you can whip your camera out for a quick snap, a bloody great T-Rex appears out of nowhere and makes a grab for your head. There might have been other moments in games where you turn and run in blind panic until you can run no further. But this is the one. Terrifying, exhilarating and so immersive you forget you're playing a game. How did it all go so badly wrong?

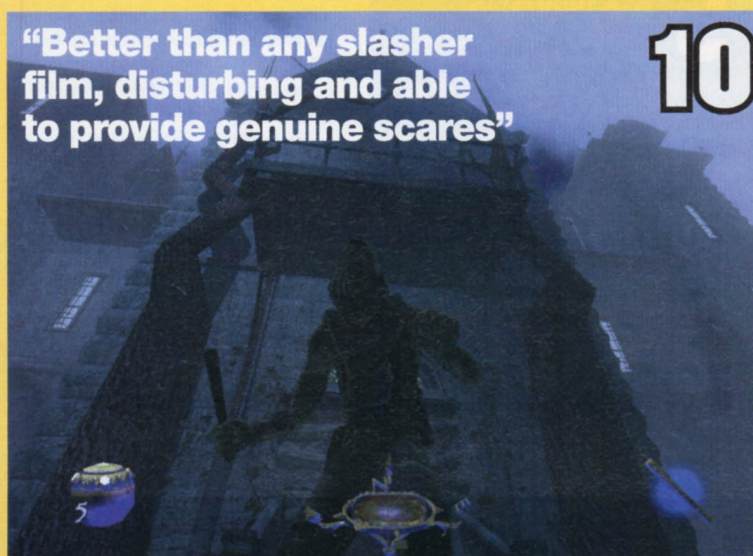
"Better than any slasher film, disturbing and able to provide genuine scares"

10

THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS

Robbing the Cradle

Possibly the most nerve-jangling experience the humble PC has ever offered, the Shalebridge Cradle in the third *Thief* game is a triumph of map design, suspense, trickery and (above all) sound. Better than any slasher film, worryingly psychologically disturbing and able to provide genuine scares as opposed to cheap fairground jumps – *Thief: Deadly Shadows* may have its issues, but the Cradle is simply an essential play for every fan of gaming everywhere. The fact that you spend a good half-hour creeping around with only your nerves for company builds up into a remarkably scary pay-off and an unforgettable experience.



Quite possibly the scariest PC game of all time.



“The Cyberdemon was fundamentally bowel-quivering in his day, and still haunts veteran PC gamers”

8 DOOM

Facing off against the Cyberdemon

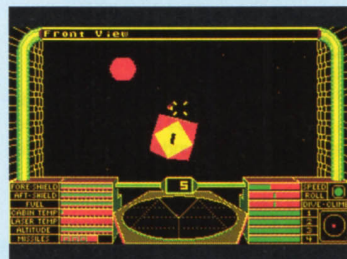
The best boss in PC gaming history, you can't justifiably claim to be knowledgeable in the art of FPS shootery until you've fought the original (and best) incarnation of the Cyberdemon. Trapped in a gigantic area in the shape of a pentagram, never quite knowing whether or not the rocket-toting bastard will be around the next corner, the Cyberdemon was fundamentally bowel-quivering in his day. The way he would disappear in a waft of bloody mist and leave the stumps of his legs behind him still haunts veteran PC gamers to this day.



7 ELITE

Docking for the first time

What made Bell and Braben's genre-defining wireframe space sim so mind-blowing was the fact you could choose to become a



bounty-hunter, pirate, miner, trader, warrior or whatever at any time by your actions alone – there were no RPG-style stats screens to wade through. However, before you could go where no-one has gone before, you had to overcome the most difficult part of the game: docking.

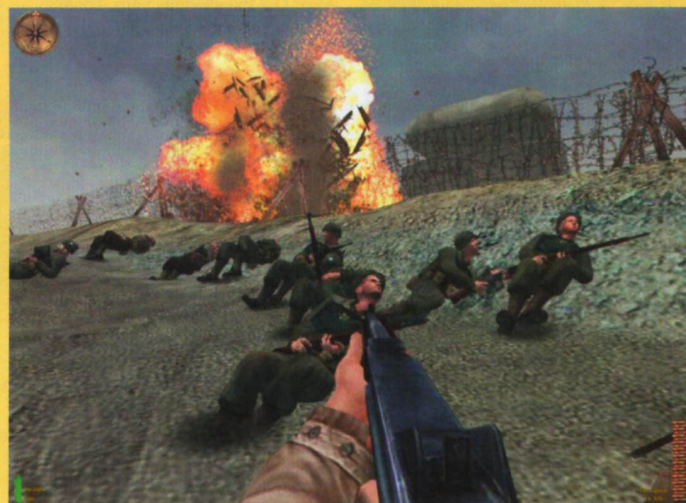
Each of the thousands of different planets that you traded with had their own slowly-rotating space station that could only be entered via a small horizontal hole in the side. Docking procedure involved manoeuvring your Cobra Mark III into position so that you approached at the correct angle, then carefully matching the rotation of the space station before accelerating into the opening. Make a mistake and you ended up crashing your ship and spilling the contents of your cargo bay into space, leaving you with no option but to load up the last planet and try again.

Docking was almost as difficult as reading the hugely pretentious sci-fi novella you received with the game, but the feeling when you finally mastered the skill of the

6 MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT

OMAHA BEACH LANDING

The first of the new batch of war shooters (the variety that have you quivering behind rocks as opposed to striding purposefully towards a bunker of Nazis absorbing bullets), the Omaha beach landing is perhaps the most absorbing level of any shooter. Perhaps slightly out-classed these days by the Stalingrad levels of *Call Of Duty*, *Allied Assault* deserves its place here simply because it was the first time we'd experienced anywhere near such levels of emotion, kinetics and simply not knowing what the hell was going on while all hell was breaking out around you. Unrealistic in terms of real warfare, obviously, but a seminal moment in the history of PC gaming nevertheless – that moment where the landing board falls down and the chaos begins will never be bettered.



Why watch *Saving Private Ryan* when you can experience it yourself?

space rendezvous was sublime. Of course, the first item most people bought when they'd amassed enough credits was... A docking computer.

4 TIE FIGHTER

Being recruited into the Imperial Elite

TIE Fighter was the sequel to Larry Holland's magnificent 3D space shooter/flight sim experience *X-Wing* and as well as delivering better graphics and the ability to turn to the Dark Side for the first time, the game introduced a ground-

breaking dual-mission system. As an Imperial Pilot, you completed battle missions for your commander, such as inspecting cargo containers for signs of Rebel smuggling, to improve your military rank. However, as the plot progressed, you met an enigmatic hooded figure known as the Emperor's 'special envoy' who also asked you to undertake special objectives so you could become part of Palpatine's Secret Order.

What was so ingenious – and why this hasn't been used more in videogames remains a mystery – is that the missions from the two factions vying for your loyalty often conflicted with each other. This meant that you had to decide mid-mission whether to obey your commander's instructions to capture a fleeing Rebel ship, for example, or complete the Secret Order's mission of destroying it.

If you did decide to blow the craft to smithereens, you were given a sound bollocking by your Imperial master, but straight afterwards congratulated by the Emperor's spy, who presented you with a prestigious award (such as the Emperor's Hand) in a secret ceremony. Joining a cult was never so deliciously enjoyable.

5 KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

“They say the Force can do terrible things to a mind.”

For fear of ruining the game for a single member of the PCZ readership we won't go into detail, but for the cognoscenti... Well, *that bit* (where Revan's new identity is revealed). The way that even messages on loading screens are there to slowly fill in residual information before the BIG reveal levels you with its brilliant simplicity and its magnificent trick of making you aware of the intergalactic comings and goings, but you never suspect the integral role that you once played. Awesome.



3

DEUS EX

Trying to escape from Hell's Kitchen

Death, apparently, isn't always the end. Especially on your final visit to Hell's Kitchen in the original *Deus Ex*. After an exhilarating flight-or-fight decision made in your brother's apartment while men in black bark orders through the door, you make a sprint for the subway with only the lucky avoiding getting mown down like a dog in the

street. Even if you do make it to the train, you get surrounded by officials commanded by Gunther Hermann and are given a final option whether to turn yourself in or die fighting.

Should you decide to be shot into pile of leather and augmentations however, in the most prominent 'WTF?' moment in PC gaming history, your fingers never actually have to hit the quick-load key. You wake up unexpectedly in an enemy cell. You escape, revived and restored, and work your way up through the subterranean

levels of the strange base you've woken up in. Only to realise that this is UNATCO's HQ. The area you began the game in, and the area that you know better than any other. Then, if you so choose, you get to run riot.

This is pure gameplay genius and a seminal point in the craft of PC gaming – and even better than the bit where you get told off for going into the women's toilets. Four years on and *Deus Ex* still hasn't been bettered, and won't be for a few years yet.



"Or not. We don't care. We've all got rocket launchers."



Fight or flight: the choice is yours.

2

HALF-LIFE AND HALF-LIFE 2

Too much to mention

The grenade thrown in the pipe. The crossbow dangling above the infested waters. Tooling yourself up then

teleporting to Xen. Watching Freeman teleport to Xen in *Opposing Force*. The opening train ride. The experiment going wrong. Your first headcrab. The cliff face. Calling in the Air Strike. The army being called in. The first time you see a marine killing a scientist. Tossing a snark out of a ventilation hatch. The tappety-tap-tap special-ops ninja women.

Picking up the can. Exploring City 17. The combine ploughing their way through the slum tenement. Commanding your army of bugs. "Great job, Gordon!

Throwing that switch and all, I can see your MIT education really pays for itself." Playing catch with dog. Igniting the gas leaks in Ravensholm. Firing rockets at Striders from rooftops. Firing paint cans at zombies. Drainpipes knocking and heralding an attack. Entering the citadel. Dashing along the underside of the bridge in search of rocket ammunition. What cat? The powered-up gravity gun.

The Freeman franchise has provided so many joyous moments that the entire top 50 could have been plucked solely from two games. As the man says, the right man in the wrong place can make all the difference in the world. But for us, the single greatest moment of all is also perhaps the simplest. It's subtle, but the moment Barney leans over the rail and tosses you the crowbar encapsulates five years of longing in an instant. Magic.



Zombie + paint = hilarity.



You might be needing this.



Better than an AIBO.



AND SO THE BEST MOMENT OF PC GAMING IS

1 THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND

I am rubber, you are glue



Soon you'll be wearing my sword like a shish kebab!
You fight like a dairy farmer.
Boy are you ugly!
What an idiot!
You call yourself a pirate!
I give up, you win!

Funniest. Game. Ever.



Stan the used-ship salesman. Brilliant.



Our home away from home.

THE PERFECT MOMENT HOW APPROPRIATE, YOU FIGHT LIKE A COW

Intelligent, literary, visually brilliant, genuinely puzzling and entirely hysterical, the sword-fighting in *The Secret Of Monkey Island* raises an already brilliant adventure game into the halls of the gods. No-one can ever rightly call themselves a gaming fan unless they've experienced the insult sword-fighting system (try for yourself in the community section at www.scummbar.com). A masterclass in verbal jousting with some of the funniest one-liners ever seen in gaming and never bettered in over 15 years of gaming since. Absolutely classic.

The fact that the golden-age of original PC gaming coincided with the LucasArts' glory days is no coincidence – whatever its recent crimes, its games were packed with staggering moments of gaming ingenuity. Moments of wit, flair, imagination, brilliant originality and a remarkably non-corporate, piss-taking mentality. Nowhere is this better shown than in *The Secret Of Monkey Island*. When this feature was suggested, we all assumed that *Half-Life* would win by default, but on discussion we realised that there was a more powerful challenger that we all secretly felt should win. And... Look behind you – it's a three-headed monkey!



THE TESTIMONY OF WILLIAM ROBERT PORTER:

The joy that the *Monkey Island* series has brought me has no rival on any platform

"It represents a man (Ron Gilbert) and a company (LucasArts) at the peak of their creative powers"

or any other genre. Whether it's the backstage romp in Governor Marley's mansion (with the stapler, the yak and the giant lips), or the flagrant plugging of the LucasArts tip line when Guybrush gets lost in the woods and has to call his own publishers for help – there's a myriad of brilliant moments contained within the life and times of Guybrush Threepwood. Best bit other than swordplay? Being underwater and tied down with all the sharp objects just out of reach perhaps? The 'Game Over' screen appearing when you fall off the mountain? Nah... "Give me

one good reason why I shouldn't kill ye." "I'm wired to explode if anyone tries to kill me."



THE TESTIMONY OF JAMES ROBERT SEFTON:

I played *The Secret Of Monkey Island* on a crappy IBM XT 086 personal computer, but even with painfully slow graphics, minimal sound and a green screen (256-colours were for wimps), it was still the funniest game ever. Another favourite bit? There are so many from it, but it has to be when Guybrush stumbles upon a tree

stump, through which he can see a huge system of catacombs. When he tries to squeeze through a small gap, the game asks you to 'Insert Disk 22 and Press Button to Continue'. After you've searched the *Monkey Island* box for a non-existent floppy disk, and been given more ridiculous requests for different disks, Threepwood finally gives up: "I guess I'm not going in there, then." Genius.



THE TESTIMONY OF PAUL PREZZLER PRESLEY:

What can I add? Other than *The Secret Of Monkey Island* always has been and always will be my personal benchmark not just for adventure games, but for games in general. The game represents both a man (Ron Gilbert) and a company (LucasArts) at the very peak of their creative powers. As with the others above, there are many personal moments of sheer laugh-out-loud brilliance throughout the game (the three trials of 'Swordplay, Thievery and, er, Treasure Huntary' or the blind lookout man), but my personal 'best bit' (other



Q&A

RON GILBERT: BEHIND THE MONKEY



The creator of the *Monkey Island* series speaks exclusively to PC ZONE!

PCZ How do you feel about *Monkey Island 1* being No.1?

RON I think it's fantastic, and I'm always amazed at how many times *Monkey Island* gets mentioned, even though the game is close to 15 years old. I suppose I'll have to get something about *Monkey Island* chiselled on my tombstone...

PCZ What are your personal favourite *Monkey Island* gaming moments?

RON I love the tree stump/insert disk 22 gag. After the game was released, the tech support line would get serious calls about there not being a disk 22 in the box. The tech support people hated me for a while. I also loved the top-down map on *Monkey Island*, which was supposed to be a far more complex segment of the game that played more like an RPG, but we never had the time. Stan has to top my list as well. It was the most complex dialog we'd written and it's completely twisted, but just like talking to a real used car salesman. Oh, and jumping off the cliff, then bouncing back after the Sierra-ish dialog – that was fun.

PCZ Do you feel that *Monkey Island*-style games are still relevant for today's PC gamer?

RON Yes, I think they're a great model for how to integrate story into a game. I wish designers working on games today paid more attention to the lessons we learnt back then.

You can check out Ron Gilbert's website at www.grumpygamer.com

than the insult sword-fighting) is the final utilisation of the ever-present rubber-chicken-with-a-pulley-in-the-middle. It's been with you since practically the start of the game, it's an object that makes no logical sense, you've used it fruitlessly on every interactive item you've come upon, and then when you finally figure out its use, it's just so throwaway it's fantastic. Ron Gilbert. A god among men. [E]

GET INVOLVED!

So that's what we think are the 50 greatest PC gaming moments. But what do you think? Is there something we've missed out? Are you incandescent with rage that there are no Davilex games featured? And what about our No.1 choice? Write to us at the usual address, email or join in the thread in our chat forum at www.pczone.co.uk and let us know what you think.

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Nathan Frost installs Windows Explorer.



'Snowblind' is static interference.



A rechargeable shield can protect you from enemy fire.



"I'm really sorry about this..."

Deus Ex appeal...

PROJECT: SNOWBLIND

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Crystal Dynamics

PUBLISHER Eidos

WEBSITE www.projectsnowblind.com
ETA March

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- A *Deus Ex* shooter in all but name...
- ...but with a whole lot more in-your-face action
- Cool bio-mod super-powers
- Superb weapons

Jamie Sefton boosts his games journalism nano-augmentation to play the futuristic shooter that JC Denton left behind

FOR MANY, *Deus Ex* remains one of the finest PC games ever – an intoxicating mix of sci-fi conspiracy, RPG, stealth and shooter that forced you to use brains as well as brawn. Unfortunately, developer Ion Storm is now no more, shut down by publisher Eidos after the low-key releases of the *Deus Ex* sequel *Invisible War* and *Thief: Deadly Shadows*, with the respected head honcho Warren Spector moving on to pastures new.

So what has this got to do with *Project: Snowblind*? Well, the game was originally conceived as a first-person shooter called *Deus Ex: Clan Wars*; a simpler, more instantly gratifying pumped-up dumber clone of JC Denton – Bubba Denton, if you will. Developer Crystal Dynamics (also busy reshaping the norks of Lara Croft in the new *Tomb Raider*) has dumped the famous name, but the similarities to *Deus Ex* are unmistakable. *Snowblind* has a futuristic 2065 Hong Kong setting, bio-augmentations, icepick hacking into cameras and bots, primary and

secondary objectives, multiple pathways and several other features that give away the origin of the game (see '*Deus Ex Déjà Vu*', right).

SOLDIER, SOLDIER

The action is relentless right from the beginning, with none of the usual atmospheric learning curve of *Deus Ex*, as it hurls you into a chaotic battle between the Liberty Coalition forces and the Republic. The revolution is being led by a twisted general bent on unleashing a *Snowblind* weapon – a huge EMP blast that disrupts bio-mechanical systems and other electronic devices, temporarily disabling them with static. Your character, Nathan Frost, fights alongside dozens of other AI-controlled soldiers, who cover your back, launch attacks, take over gun turrets and chip in with quips such as "Aaaagh! My wife specifically told me not to get shot!"

Immediately you're struck by the colourful, frenetic pyrotechnics on display – this is no greyed-out, science-fiction dull-a-thon like *Minority Report*. Neon

CV

CRYSTAL DYNAMICS

The San Francisco-based developer and publisher was bought by Eidos in 1998, and is most famous for its *Soul Reaver/Blood Omen* titles.

1998 *Gex 3D* – basically a *Super Mario 64* rip-off with a lizard.

2002 *Blood Omen 2* was a gory, third-person adventure in the famous vampire/goth *Kain* universe. Great atmosphere and graphics, but a little linear and repetitive.

2003 *Legacy Of Kain: Defiance* was the best of the reave 'em ups, with a satisfying new combat system and telekinetic powers.

2005 After Core Design cocked up the last outing for Lara Croft, Eidos handed the development duties of *Tomb Raider 7* to Crystal Dynamics, which should be with us this summer (hopefully).



"Twenty seconds to comply!"

signs glow above exotic Eastern buildings, missile trails and fiery explosions rain in around you, objects and ragdoll bodies fly, and bullets spark and zing off metal surfaces. This is *Blade Runner* on fast-forward.

However, just minutes into the conflict, you're badly injured by a bomb blast while rescuing a fallen comrade, and in a sequence nicked from *RoboCop*, are given a multi-billion dollar refit with the latest technological modifications – bionic legs, electronic eyesight, mechanical

"You're given a multi-billion dollar refit – mechanical buttocks – the whole works"

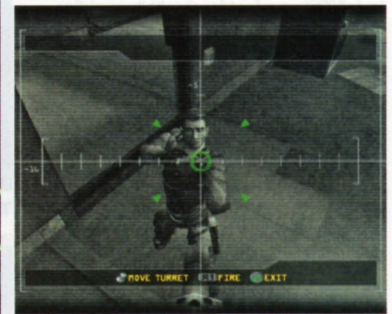
buttocks – the whole works. However, rather than being able to use everything to play with at once like a spoilt child on Christmas morning, the bio-mods are dribbled out over the course of the game through upgrades and hacks.

BIONIC MAN

Nathan Frost sets out on his 11 missions with a vision enhancement that enables him to see people's heat signatures through walls, but he soon gets hold of Ballistic Shield for protection, and Reflex Boost, which is basically a slo-mo capability for dodging bullets and taking



Med-i-bot!



Control remote turrets with your icepick.

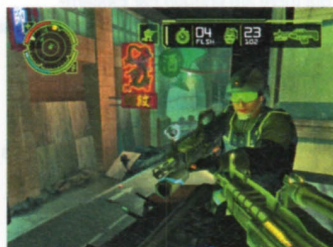
DEUS EX DÉJÀ VU

SIX OBVIOUS 'HOMAGES' TO DEUS EX IN PROJECT: SNOWBLIND



1. HACKING

The icepick is a really handy tool, allowing you to hack your way into bots as well as computer terminals. This in turn will get you remote access to cameras and gun turrets.



4. FUTURISTIC HONG KONG

Deus Ex had quite a few Hong Kong levels (also set in the year 2065) and *Snowblind* continues the trend. Plus, we're sure we saw a Tracer Tong lookalike called Major Chung...



2. BOTS

Snowblind is full of large hulking ED209-lookalikes that you can take out with heavy weaponry, hack into, or simply use as a vehicle. A more obvious similarity to *Deus Ex* are the spider bots...



5. MULTIPLE PATHWAYS

Each level can be completed in different ways. You can be stealthy by using the Cloak bio-mod, sneak through the air ducts to hack into computer terminals or go in the front door all guns blazing.



3. BIO-MODS

In *Snowblind* there are fewer nano-augmentations, they are simpler to use, and you don't get to specialise, but the concept is pretty much identical to the one in the *Deus Ex* games.



6. PHYSICS

Deus Ex was one of the first games where you could interact with the world around you. *Snowblind* has much-improved physics and even adds a *Half-Life 2* gravity gun, the Kinetic Kicker.



Hack into huge military bots and cause chaos.

out multiple bad guys. Another favourite bio-mod is Cloak, which gives you invisibility – perfect for stealthily avoiding security cameras, and sneaking up behind enemies to kill them at point-blank range. You have limited bio-energy for running these super-sub-routines (which depletes a little too quickly for my liking) that can be recharged with pick-ups, but you don't get the opportunity to completely customise your character to suit your favoured style of play, as you can with the RPG-friendly *Deus Ex* titles.

Project: Snowblind also has a neat collection of gadgets that you can collect and use in the field, with the most important being the icepick, a hacking device that you can use to assume control of computers, gun turrets, cameras and best of all, bots. In one sequence, a rather large metal walking machine was lurching towards me, intent on ripping me a new augmentation, but with one sharp shot from the icepick, I was instantly in control. Switching to a view screen from inside the bot, I could stomp around as well as operate the machine's machine gun and rocket launcher, making mincemeat of a troop of soldiers with a hail of hot lead and a devastating volley of explosives – although you have to be careful, as your body is still vulnerable while your mind is occupied.

Other useful knick-knacks include the usual frag grenades and flash bombs, an excellent portable electronic shield that folds out when you throw it, plus another familiar hangover from *Deus Ex* – spider bots – which when used, will scuttle after the nearest enemy and zap them, before following you around and making cute noises like a disturbing insect AIBO pet.

TRIGGER-HAPPY

What packs the biggest punch, though, is *Snowblind*'s weapons. There's a truly great collection of justice-givers in the armoury, each with a very special alternative-fire: a basic pistol can also fire missiles; a carbine rifle can shoot grenades that skim like stones before exploding; a shotgun that can pump out sticky bombs that attach to surfaces and detonate. Even the humble sniper rifle has



Tanks: no match for a rocket launcher.



Tetris in 2065.



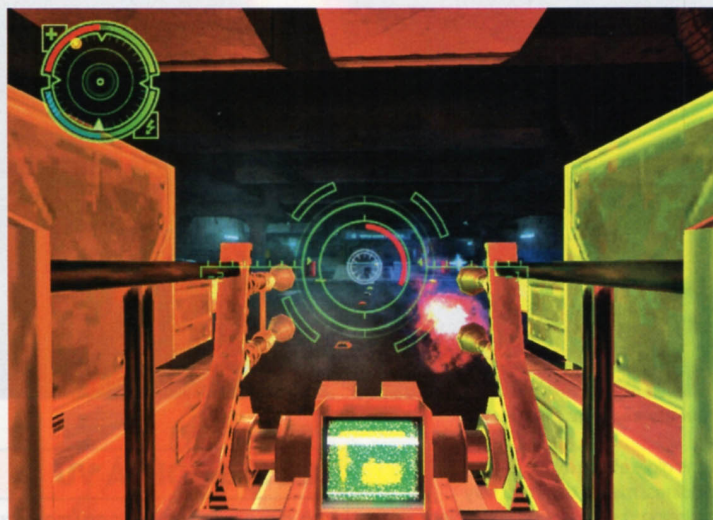
Spider bots can be friendly and hostile.

a neural virus that when launched at an enemy, causes them to 'go a bit mental' and start firing on their squad-mates, while you watch through the sights safely from a distance with an evil grin plastered on your face.

Snowblind even has a gravity gun. Just when you thought that *Half-Life 2* and the new *Doom* expansion were the only games around with this essential new weapon, it turns out that Crystal Dynamics had one up its sleeve all along – except it's called a Kinetic Kicker, and it's in no way as sophisticated or successful as Gordon Freeman's. Yet, if all that beautiful destructive chaos isn't enough, you can always put down your weaponry and knock seven bells out of foes with a hefty bio-powered punch, or



A Republic soldier is swept off his feet.



Stationary gun turrets are useful for mowing down dozens of enemy goons.

“Weapons pack the biggest punch, with a truly great collection of justice-givers in the armoury”

climb into one of the game's numerous vehicles, such as a jeep or tank, and just run them down.

HEAVY WEAPONS

Unfortunately you don't get the wide-open levels prevalent in *Far Cry* (*Snowblind* has most definitely been developed with lowly consoles in mind), but there are enough Far Eastern-flavoured maps ranging from a glamorous opera house converted into a prison, a cultural palace and a Buddhist temple. Each has multiple routes and pathways through the level, and while you don't have as much freedom as in JC Denton's world, you can still opt to sneak through an air conditioning duct and hack into a gun turret, rather than storming in like a SWAT team with behavioural problems.

Snowblind also keeps the adrenaline pumping through Nathan Frost's glowing blue veins by moving effortlessly between sections where you're a lone soldier, to full-scale battles involving you and a dozen squad-mates. There are eight multiplayer maps available for both LAN

and online play too, and all the different modes and maps can be customised at your leisure.

Yes, there are a few obvious annoyances – save rooms instead of checkpoints or quick saves, the icepick hacking tool being mixed in with the weapons (not good in the heat of a firefight) and the general console-centric feel. While *Snowblind* doesn't have the sophistication or depth of the *Deus Ex* universe, it certainly has more immediate satisfaction and excitement in the run-and-gun stakes – you won't be scrabbling around looking in rubbish skips desperate for ammo like some down-and-out assassin.

Deus Ex: Invisible War was a decent game, but for me, the options of being a full-on action hero were always too limited. And the weapons sucked. *Project: Snowblind* has the potential to be what *Aliens* was to *Alien* – alternatively it could be what *Batman & Robin* was to *Batman*. You'll have to hack into PC ZONE's database or wait until next month for the definitive verdict. **PCZ**

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PC GAMER

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ON THE MAP."**
PC ZONE

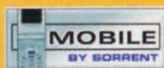
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"I think I've been spotted..."



"I'll show you a sodding 'fatal' error with Windows..."



"Did I leave the gas on?"



"It says I can get cheap Viagra. Cool!"

Hello darkness, my old friend... SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY

LAST
PREVIEWED
PCZONE
ISSUE
151

With the world once more on the brink of collapse, we turn to **PC ZONE's** senior hide-and-seek correspondent **Paul Presley** for a full report...

THERE ARE many impressive new weapons in Sam Fisher's arsenal, but the most impressive displayed in *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory* is the humour. Much has been made by lesser commentators than myself about this second sequel's snazzy new attack moves, sneaky-about skills and knife-usage, but what's been overlooked by almost everyone is just how well-scripted the game has now become.

The plot bounces along with plenty of zip and dramatic pacing and the dialogue is genuinely amusing. Plenty of wisecracks about Sam's advancing years, much comic banter between nervous guards and even a fair few in-jokes about the shortcomings of Fisher's previous gaming outings.

For example, at the start of one ship-bound homage to *Metal Gear Solid 2*, Sam assumes, in the traditional world-

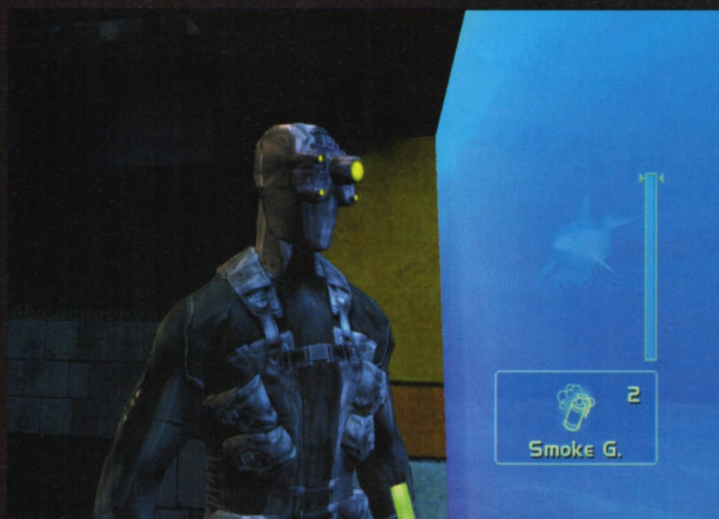
weary tones that has come to characterise Michael Ironside's take on the role, that should he trigger the standard three alarms the mission will be over. "Of course not," barks his boss's reply, "what do you think this is, a videogame?"

Or if you shoot out a light bulb, you hear the traditional: "Why's that light bulb broken? Something's not right here," from one guard, only for his compadre to reply: "What are you talking about? Light bulbs do break on their own you know. Relax..."

TALKING DOLPHINS

Talking of Ironside, much as people started to claim Brosnan was really secure in the part of James Bond by *The World Is Not Enough*, so the gravelly-voiced actor best known for playing Ham Tyler in *V* really seems to have settled comfortably into the role of Fisher's voice. More's the pity that should the aforementioned *Splinter Cell* motion picture come to fruition, it's unlikely that the star of *Starship Troopers*, *Total Recall* and, er, *SeaQuest 2032* will be considered for the lead role due to his advancing years.

Still, as far as the game's concerned, the dialogue crackles and sparks nicely, the acting is as un-wooden



Nice outfit, but how the hell does he breathe?

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Montreal
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE www.splintercell.com
ETA March

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Tightly scripted plotting and dialogue
- Genuine moments of comedy
- More freedom of action throughout each level
- Amon Tobin soundtrack

CV



UBISOFT MONTREAL

International protocol dictates that any discussion of a Montrealean person, company or product must be conducted in both French and English (*Here we go... Ed*). So, without further ado...

2003 La première *Splinter Cell* proves a formidable triumphe on the Xbox and so a PC conversion is quickly produced, improving the game in every way. Magnifique, tres bien!

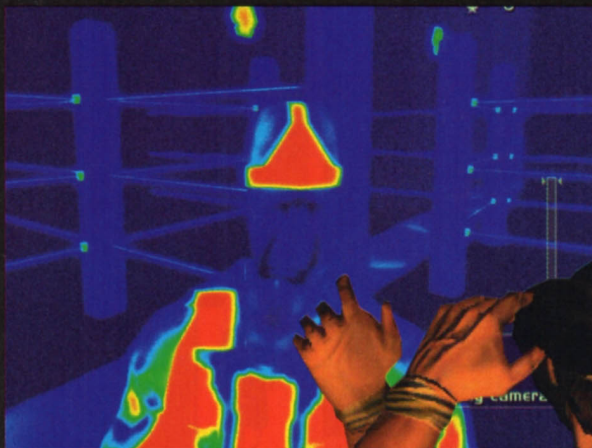
2003 *Le Prince Avec Perse: Le Sables Du Temps* reinvigorates a once ailing franchise with breathtaking 3D acrobatiques and a keen sens de l'humour. Doesn't sell very well though. C'est la vie, merde, zut alors!

2004 Bon! The sequel to *Splinter Cell - Pandora Demain* - impressed with a much improved story and an innovative quatre-player multi-joueur mode. Un café s'il vous plaît! Le singe est dans l'arbre!

as a plastic tree and everyone seems to be living their parts to the full. It helps that the plot is lively and full of the necessary twists, turns and intrigue that has come to define the modern-day espionage thriller. A slightly pat Scooby-Doo ending perhaps, but one that's forgivable



"Ah, a life at sea. Can anything be more peaceful and relaxing?"



An homage to Tron?

"The dialogue crackles and sparks nicely, and the acting is as un-wooden as a plastic tree"



"Stop crying. I'm a licensed chiropractor."

since the ride to get there appears to be shaping up nicely.

A lot of this is down to the inclusion not only of top-draw Hollywood acting 'talent' (ie Ironside and the bloke who plays President Palmer in 24), but also Andy Davis, the director of such action classics as *Under Siege*, *The Fugitive* and *Collateral Damage*. Davis has leant his hand to the pacing of the game and the direction of cut-scenes, which are looking mightily impressive.

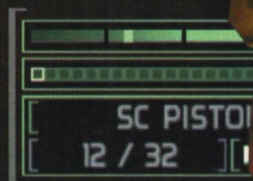
Very little of the traditional 'stiff' character rendering is on display, editing is practically identical to any top-notch motion picture, although there's perhaps a little too much reliance on the CNN-style news broadcast presentation gimmick for our liking. Still, it's absorbing enough to have made us dig out our semi-legal video file decompression programs in order to view the rest of the scenes before we

take delivery of the actual levels that surround them.

Of those levels, we were given the first four to play with and if they're anything to go by, the whole game is living up to the promises that have been made over the past half a year. Complaints of linearity that plagued the first two games appear to have been addressed, with each map seeming to borrow more from the *Thief* school of level design – here's your objective, here are your tools, work the rest out for yourself.

JUMP AROUND

It leads to some brilliantly organic moments of gameplay, especially since the old three strikes and you're out mechanic has been dropped. Alarms or discovery no longer mean game over, just game harder as reinforcements are brought in and alert levels are raised.



ADVENTURES IN FOAM



Like, cool, man.

BRAZILIAN DJS TO THE RESCUE

The version of the game supplied for this preview was sadly bereft of any real music (other than one or two stock tension-enhancing mid-level riffs), but the full game is set to feature a soundtrack scored by top Brazilian electronic fusion DJ, Amon Tobin. The score is already available as a separate CD in the States or on import, while a special edition 5.1 DVD Audio version will be released alongside the game in March.

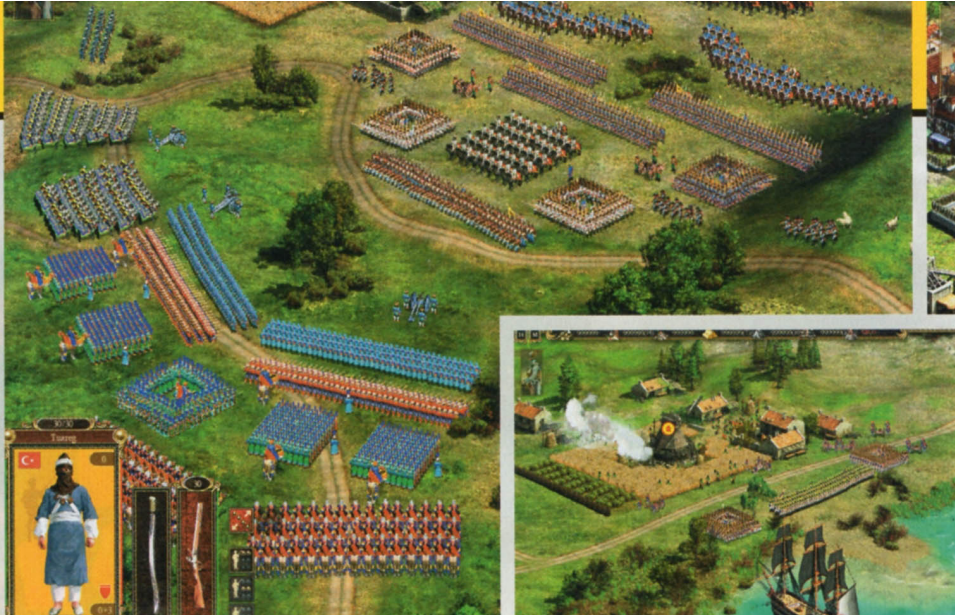
There's still a personal bugbear on show about restriction in the usage of your athletic skills. Plenty of pipes and ledges that realistically would be easy enough to climb and hang from are inaccessible because of programming limitation – something the multiplayer game, using a slightly different engine, actually suffers less from.

That's a minor issue though, and something that may well be ironed out in

later levels as the game assumes you get used to the controls. However, in four whole levels of action I only managed to find one occasion when Sam could use his famed split jump, and the SWAT wall roll move from *Pandora Tomorrow* seems to have been forgotten entirely. We'll wait until we've played the full game before passing judgement though – it may well just have been my incompetence after all. [A-]



To conquer a province, you must first overrun its capital city.



Toe to toe with the Rooskies...

COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WARS

LAST
PREVIEWED
PCZONE
ISSUE
152

Martin Korda bellows a war cry as he gets to grips with Ukraine's finest...

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER GSC Game World
PUBLISHER CDV
WEBSITE www.cossacks2.de
ETA April 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Turn-based and real-time strategy in one shiny package
- Hugely tactical and challenging battles
- Six unique nations to play as
- Historically accurate but still entertaining

"TO PLAY *Cossacks II* you must be a real man," claims GSC GameWorld's Oleg Yavorsky as he fires up the latest version of *Cossacks II: Napoleonic Wars*, a build which he claims is 95 per cent complete and so challenging that only a man with iron balls and a thick curly-haired chest could play. Sadly, no such person was available, which is why I'm here – two Chinese stress balls stuck down my pants and red curly hair drawn onto my chest with a biro (the black one ran out of ink) – ready to accept Oleg's challenge and get to grips with this strategically challenging RTS sequel. It's suicide surely, but someone's gotta do it.



Cavalry can break up enemy ranks.



Destroy French cities brick by brick.

"The game's based around Napoleon's career, but you can play as any one of six very different nations: France, Russia, Britain, Austria, Prussia and Egypt," explains Oleg as he starts up the main Battle For Europe campaign. That explained, I choose to play as self-proclaimed military genius and liquorish-obsessed short-arse Napoleon Bonaparte.

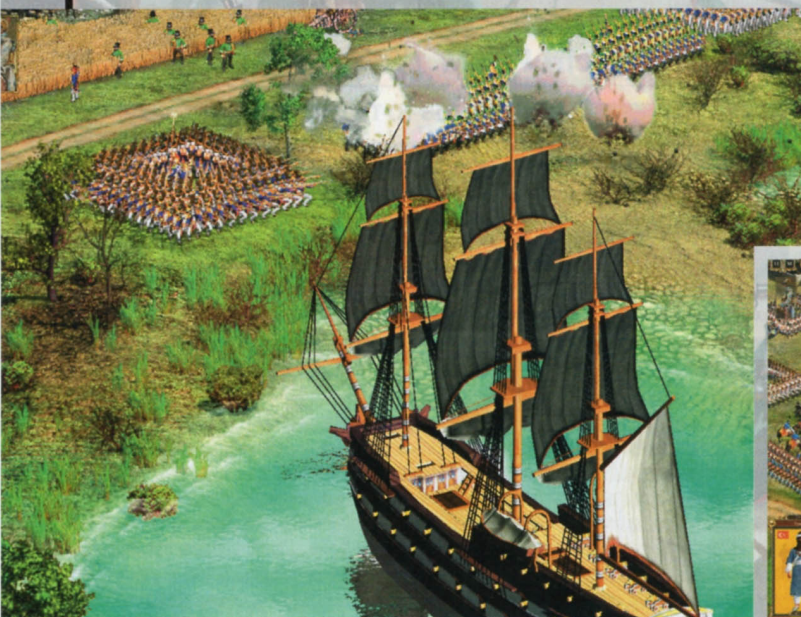
BONA TO PICK

You can play the Battle For Europe campaign from two perspectives – a turn-based strategy map and real-time strategic battles – much like *Rome: Total War*, only far more basic in execution and

nowhere near as visually impressive. The strategic map is divided into segments, each one delineating a province of Europe with its own unique strategic and economic strengths, and it's up to you to sweep across the land like a plague and capture the whole of Europe.

Perhaps the most distinct difference between this campaign and *Rome*'s is that you only get to command one army, which you must move around the map on a steady course of conquest. Each province that you hold is then defended by a computer-controlled army, which can be upgraded at a cost.

Having fortified France with a couple



The square formation gives your troops a huge defensive bonus.



Each nation has historically accurate uniforms.



Hot in the city tonight.



CV gsc game world

GSC GAME WORLD

The world might be holding its breath in anticipation of *STALKER: Shadow Of Chernobyl*, but as you can see below, GSC is no stranger to success...

- 2000** The team shoots to prominence with epic RTS, *Cossacks: European Wars*.
- 2001** Ignored by most, cliché-ridden FPS *Codename: Outbreak* actually proves to be a very entertaining shooter.
- 2002** Similar to *Cossacks* but set in the good 'ol US of A, *American Conquest* over-complicates matters with some overly fiddly resource management.
- 2004** *Alexander* – the official game of the movie – is the team's worst game to date. See the review this issue to find out precisely why.

of extra garrisons, I set off on the warpath, moving my troops into the iron-rich lands of Austria, planning then to head east into Cossack-infested Russia after stocking up on mittens and woolly hats.

BUT FIRST, AUSTRIA

"We've made these battle sections much more tactical than they were in *Cossacks*," says Oleg as I end the turn

You should see it on Saturdays...

"Mustering the kind of snorting mirth only a Frenchman can perfect, I grunt at the militia and order their execution"

and the action switches to an isometric real-time view of the battlefield. "We didn't want to make the game too hardcore though, as some players might find that frustrating. However, we were keen on preserving the realism of battle, as we want to make you feel like a real general who should care for and preserve your troops."

As this is the start of the campaign, I only have four squads of 120 men to work with, though Oleg assures me that should I show some aptitude and progress further in the campaign, I could be commanding up to 24 squads towards the latter stages of the game. If my maths is right, this means almost 150 men, give or take the odd thousand...

Forming my troops into columns in order to cover the ground quickly – you can also form them up into the combat-effective line formation and the defensively sound but static

square formation – I order the men to double-time towards a nearby outpost.

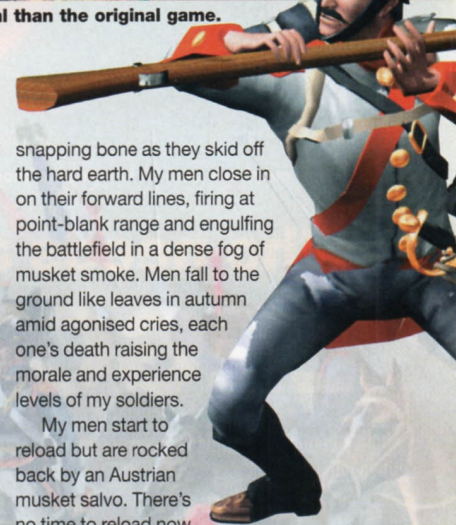
Mustering the kind of snorting mirth that only a Frenchman can fully perfect, I grunt at the pitiful band of militia guarding the outpost and order their immediate execution. A few of my men fall in the ensuing scuffle, but they're easily replenished thanks to the ability to spawn new troops at any captured outpost. Oleg informs me that each province will be filled with several of these settlements, which can be captured in order to starve the enemy of resources. Right now though, all I'm interested in is picking a fight with some lederhosen-wearing nancies.

THIGH-SLAPPING GRAPESHOT

Austrians. Thousands of them. Standing in columns, their ranks spill out in all directions. I open up with my cannons, the demolition balls carving through the densely packed enemy formations,



Cossacks II is much more tactical than the original game.



snapping bone as they skid off the hard earth. My men close in on their forward lines, firing at point-blank range and engulfing the battlefield in a dense fog of musket smoke. Men fall to the ground like leaves in autumn amid agonised cries, each one's death raising the morale and experience levels of my soldiers.

My men start to reload but are rocked back by an Austrian musket salvo. There's no time to reload now as the enemy surges forward and engages in hand-to-hand combat. Two of my outnumbered squads, shaken and demoralised by the onslaught, turn and run as my cavalry makes a last-ditch attempt to flank the well-placed Austrian battle lines. However, many of them are protected by dense forests which prevent my horsemen from entering and so they deflect many of my remaining infantry's musket shots. It's not long before my men are in full retreat back to France. No surprise there really.

Oleg flashes me a rueful look, roughly at the same time as one of the Chinese stress balls rolls down my leg and across the office floor. I've failed. But there was no shame in my defeat, as *Cossacks II* is shaping up to be a massively challenging strategic war game thanks to its emphasis on real world tactics and epic battles, as well as its clearly steep but seemingly undaunting learning curve.

It's certainly an RTS to be getting clammy at the pits about, despite its ageing engine, and in a month or two you'll be able to find out for yourself if the finished product warrants Oleg's bold statement about manhood when we run an exclusive review and playable demo of the game. Now where did that damn stress ball go? [E]

ALL'S FAIR IN WAR

VIOLENCE DOESN'T SOLVE EVERYTHING

While *Cossacks II* is predominantly about battlefield tactics, there are also a few other tricks you can employ to give yourself the upper hand. Early on, forging alliances will be essential, as will negotiating rights of passage through neutral territories and swapping much needed resources – due to each province specialising in either wood, food, stone, gold, iron or coal.

However, while you're exchanging pleasantries, you'll also be able to covertly sponsor rebellions or poison wells in order to destabilise a province and make it ripe for conquest.



Diplomacy and sabotage are your best weapons on the strategic map.



"Come over here and I'll knock your blocks off."

Who needs anti-aliasing?

LEGO STAR WARS

The greatest gaming concept ever devised? **Paul Presley** puts the pieces together

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Traveller's Tales

PUBLISHER Eidos

WEBSITE www.legostarwarsgame.com

ETA April 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's *Star Wars*
- It's LEGO
- *Episodes I, II and III* in building brick form
- Every character is playable with hundreds of secrets to unlock

CV



TRAVELLER'S TALES

Based in Cheshire of all places, Traveller's Tales has been producing games for the younger market for the better part of ten years. From *Disney* to *Muppets*, if the kids love it, you'll find it here. That said, there have also been a few other titles console fans may recognise...

2001 *Crash Bandicoot: The Wrath Of Cortex* provides the PS2 with a much needed platform gaming mascot. Xbox and GameCube versions quickly follow.

2002 *Haven: Call Of The King* ships on PS2, combining platforming, racing, role-playing and every other game type you can think of.

2004 The bandicoot makes a return in *Crash Twinsanity*, again on the consoles.

IT'S QUARTER past four on editorial deadline day. Tensions in the office have been rising all day due to overworked staffers, faulty equipment, time-sapping training sessions, managerial interference at the executive level and the million and one other niggling little things that happen on a regular basis in the hectic world of magazine production. All it's going to take is one wrong word and we'll be at each other's throats, spilling blood and rending limbs. Then salvation arrives, wrapped in a brown, padded envelope.

BUILD UP

Suddenly all our worries, all our strife, all the tension is gone. We're all 12 years old again (for some the journey is quicker than for

others), and the world seems alive with hope and possibilities. Landmark office moments – when a crowd gathers around a single monitor to witness a game's first pre-installation moments of glory – are few and far between, but when they happen you can feel the magic in the air.

"Look at that!"

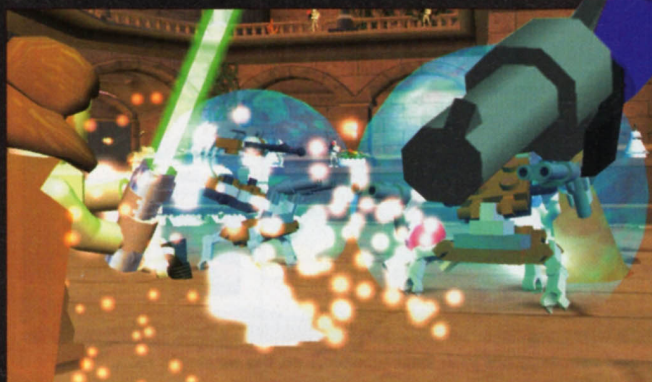
"It's Obi-Wan!"

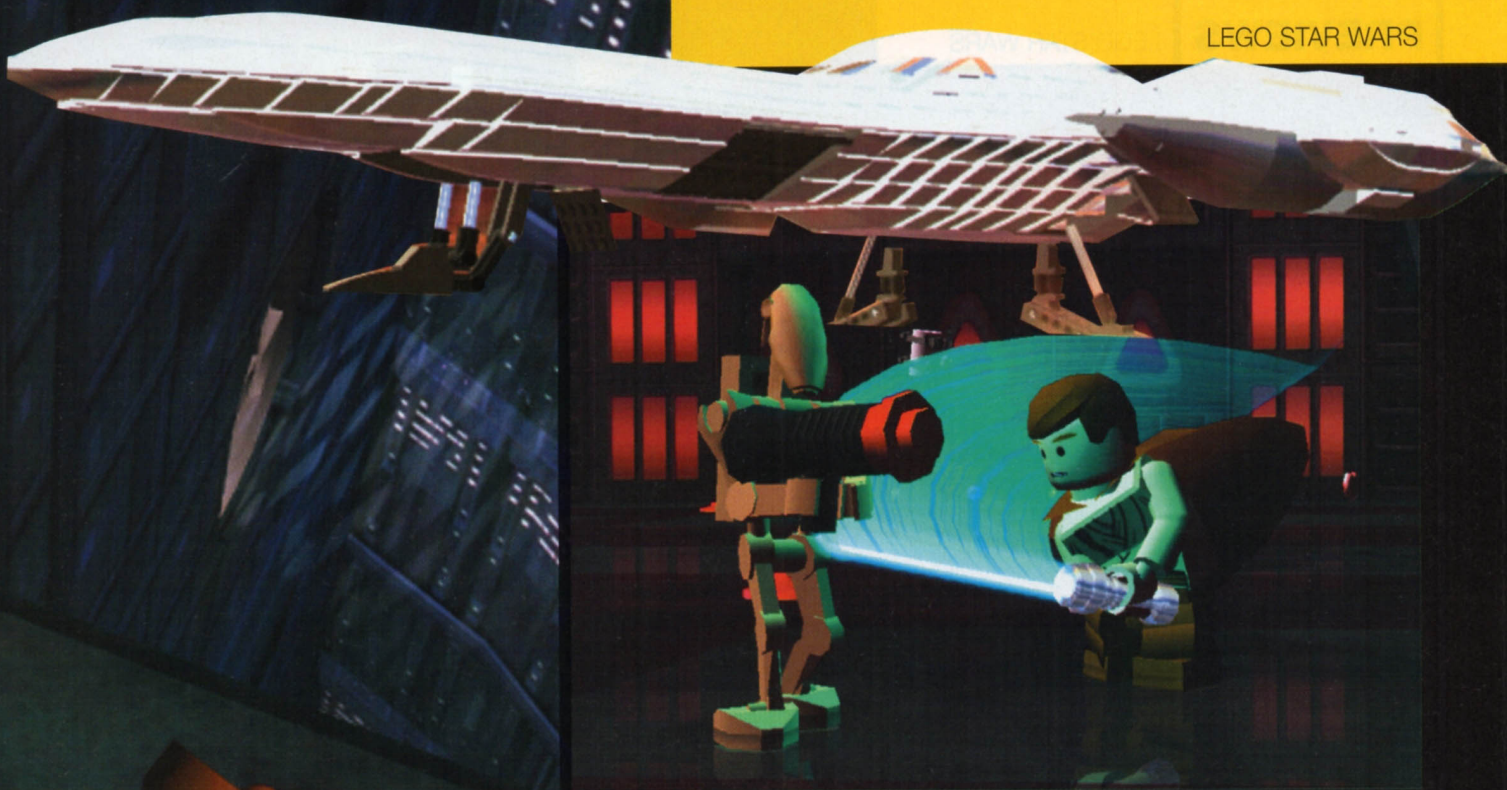
"This is brilliant!"

"My go! My go!"

"This game is the reason I love my job."

Why are we so captivated by this? It's kid's stuff surely? LEGO. *Star Wars*. Would we be as excited if it was *Sticklebrick Star*





Every enemy is deformable.

Obi-Wan (with an AI Qui-Gon in tow), in an early cantina, doors leading to the different episodes leading off. It's a game menu really, but a playable one that shows just how much thought is going into the game.

From there you enter the door of the episode and scene of your choice (unlocking them as you go, naturally), watch the LEGO-rendered cut-scenes, and take control. Depending on the scene you're either running, jumping, shooting, lightsabering, piloting, force manipulating, or any combination of the above in a *Golden Axe*-style game world.

TWO WORLDS

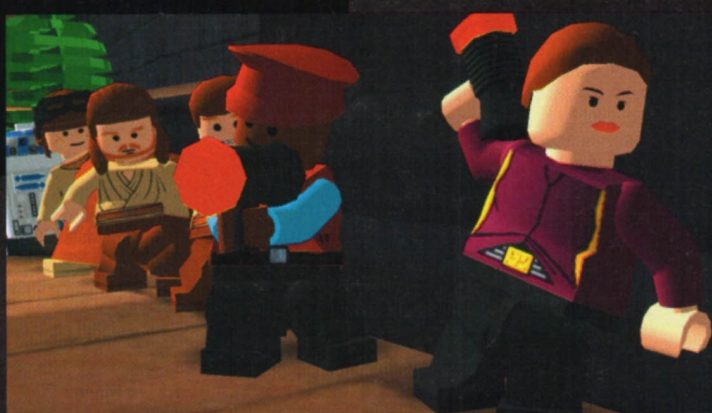
Where this becomes so much more than the sum of its parts is in the execution. Developer Traveller's Tales has managed to take two completely distinct 'universes', each with their own internal logic and rules, and mesh them together into what is looking

I bet this took a lot of bricks.

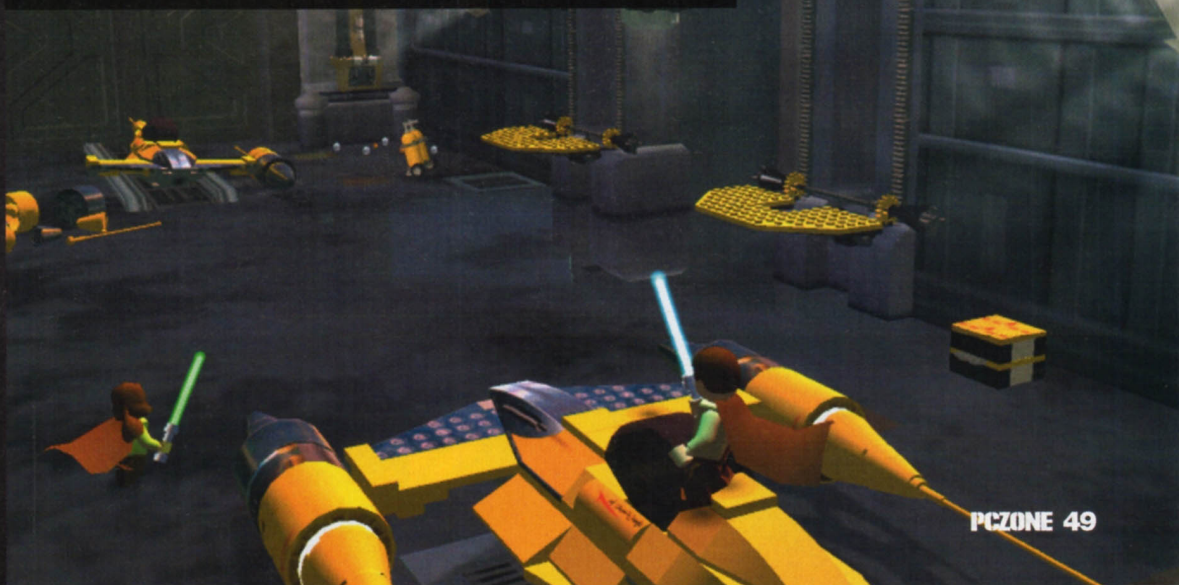
Trek'? Probably not. But both LEGO and *Star Wars* can be said to be the very stitching in the fabric of our life's path into games journalism. They're why we do what we do and enjoy it so much. Everybody had LEGO growing up, and we all grew up with Luke, Han, Chewie and Yoda. And when Leia came on the scene, some of us grew up quicker than others. Even before playing the game, we were excited by the concept. Sefton and myself first saw it at EGN last year, and were like giddy schoolboys when we were both given a LEGO Stormtrooper keyring as a freebie. Jamie's is on a shelf at home and mine's on my desk at work. In fact, I used it to type the word 'desk' just then. Don't laugh! This stuff matters.

FORCE JUMPERS

OK, I'm waffling a little I guess. I haven't even gone into any game detail yet. Sorry, it's just that I want you to understand how absolutely mammoth this game is to us here at ZONE. Let's get into it. What, exactly, is *LEGO Star Wars*? At the heart of it, I guess it's a platform game. You begin as *Episode I*



All your favourites are here and so is Jam-Jar.





Even LEGO Yoda is playable.



The Force is brilliantly realised.

Good, bad? It's a fine line.

puzzle design; extras and secrets can all be unlocked console game-style, letting you replay completed levels with different characters – some of whose special abilities provide access to hidden areas. We've even seen the game's ultimate reward and it's left us grinning from ear to ear. No spoilers here, but we hope you agree with us when you see it for yourself.

Probably the best way we can describe how important we feel this will be is the simple fact that, had it not arrived when it did, there may not even have been a magazine this month. We would probably have killed each other several times over by the end of it. Instead we all skip down the road together now, holding hands and lacing daisies into each other's hair. *LEGO Star Wars* – the game that saved *PC ZONE*. **PCZ**

On top of all that, what really makes the game is the humour. It would have been very easy to make this a po-faced

**"We all skip down the road now,
lacing daisies into each other's hair"**

The gameplay hasn't been skimmed on either. The use of multiple character control (especially so with two players in a brilliant co-op mode) lends itself to some excellent

EPISODE III – REVEALED!

REVENGE OF THE SITH IN FULL. IN LEGO

Great Gaming Moments – Number 51: when you discover the preview code for *LEGO Star Wars* you've been sent has an easily accessible cheat menu that lets you unlock every character, item and, most importantly, every level in the game. That's every level. Including all the *Episode III* scenes. Hurrerrrrhhhhh...

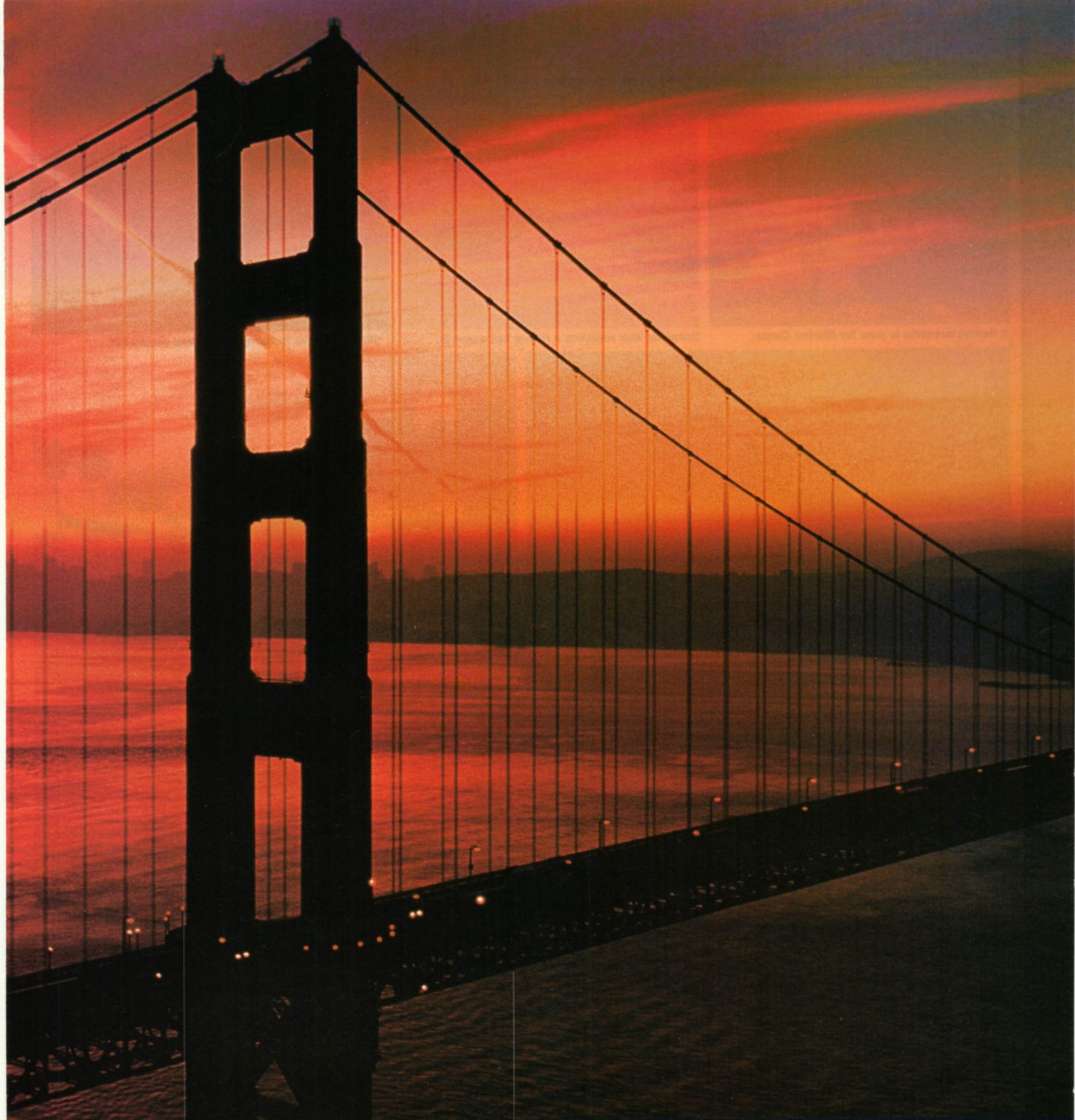
The second – the very second – that fact was discovered, it soon became apparent who the real fanboys were. Sefton and Porter practically ran screaming from my desk, covering their eyes and shouting, "Aarrgh! Don't tell us anything! Don't tell us anything!" while I casually played through the opening scenes of the upcoming film. Yep, the whole film is in there, and in direct contravention of the 53rd amendment to the Human Rights Act, I'm going to tell you all about the best bits right here. Lucas be damned!

First up, it all opens with CENSORED CENSORED going CENSORED CENSORED CENSORED. Then CENSORED jumps to CENSORED and CENSOR's CENSORED right in the CENSORED. Another great bit is on CENSORED, where thousands of CENSORS storm the CENSORED in what is obviously *Star Wars'* attempt to capture the *Saving Private* CENSORED magic. It all ends with CENSORED and CENSORED (oh, and CENSORED) going head to head with CENSORED in the enormous CENSORED



CENSOR. A prolonged CENSOR takes place with CENSORED, CENSORED, CENSORED, CENSORED, CENSORED and CENSORED facing off against CENSORED, CENSORED, CENSORED and CENSORED, until CENSORED finally puts on the CENSORED mask.

So, as you can see, it's going to be one hell of a way to end the saga, and just remember where you read it all first. Unless the censors get to the mag first. The CENSOREDs.



RED SKY AT NIGHT...

A desert scenario is new for *Marine Corps*.

Barnsley was enjoying a rather hot summer.



"Why do I have to carry the packed lunches?"



The US Marines took the Henley Regatta a bit too seriously.

The scale of *Marine Corps* seems to be on a par with *Joint Ops*.

Don't forget the umlauts...

SÖLDNER: MARINE CORPS

Jamie Sefton messes about on the river – and shoots people

GET READY for the big scoop – contrary to reports on the Interweb that the new expansion pack for the online shooter *Söldner: Secret Wars* had been cancelled, PC ZONE brings you this exclusive first look! Basically, developer Wings Simulations was removed from the project weeks before the game was ready, so the final code could be finished in-house at publisher JoWooD.

OK, it's not really on a scale with an announcement of *Half-Life 3*, but we reckon these most recent screens actually

show a great deal of promise. We were rather harsh on *Söldner* (40 per cent – ouch) because of the game's numerous bugs and awful vehicle handling. However, subsequent patches apparently fixed everything – especially the dodgy physics – and according to community manager at JoWooD, Marc Olbertz, the new expansion pack *Marine Corps* is going to seriously challenge NovaLogic's excellent multiplayer FPS *Joint Ops*.

PROMISES, PROMISES

"We're running a closed beta programme with members of the *Söldner* community, who are giving us awesome feedback and input for the completion of the expansion pack," says Olbertz. "The overall game has been polished and includes a fresh new general user interface, reworked sound system and improved Advanced Destruction System for blowing up bridges, oil pipelines and other stuff with spectacular particle effects."

Like the original, *Söldner: Marine Corps* takes place in the near future

across various continents, with you being able to become a member of a special ops squad with an armoury of weapons to tool up. To get around the huge maps – which now include desert and island scenarios – you'll be able to commandeer dozens of vehicles, including a Tiger helicopter, Leopard tank and Wombat armoured car. Probably.

Also, amphibious and marine warfare are now included, so you'll be able to have fun in the sun with various speedboats, jet skis and water craft, as well as squeezing your character into the new scuba diving gear. JoWooD is also obviously paying attention to what's going on in the world today, with *Marine Corps* now including major desert combat, with the addition of sand-swept camouflaged fatigues, vehicles and character classes – an obvious attempt to see off the forthcoming *Battlefield 2*.

"You're equipped with the best

weapons in modern warfare, and the freedom to choose from more than 100 weapons and 100 vehicles," continues Olbertz. "Because you're never restricted to a class like medic or sniper, and can also become the leader in commander mode, ordering artillery strikes and issuing team instructions, we're confident that *Marine Corps* will offer players new possibilities in tactical warfare."

Check out these screenshots and you'll see that the game is looking surprisingly decent, despite the machinations behind its development. Find out if *Söldner: Marine Corps* can banish the memories of the flawed original – the fog of war lifts in next issue's review. **[PZ]**



"Hold position. Great, now I look really cool."

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER JoWooD
PUBLISHER JoWooD
WEBSITE www.secretwars.net
ETA April

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

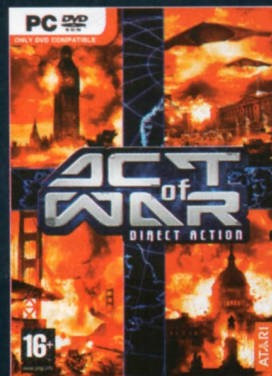
- First expansion pack for *Söldner: Secret Wars*
- Promises to fix all the problems that plagued the original game
- Over 100 vehicles and 100 weapons
- New marine warfare feature





...TOMORROW WE FIGHT

< THE TERROR BEGINS MARCH 18TH...
VISIT: WWW.ATARI.COM/ACTOFWAR
TO PREPARE YOURSELF... >>



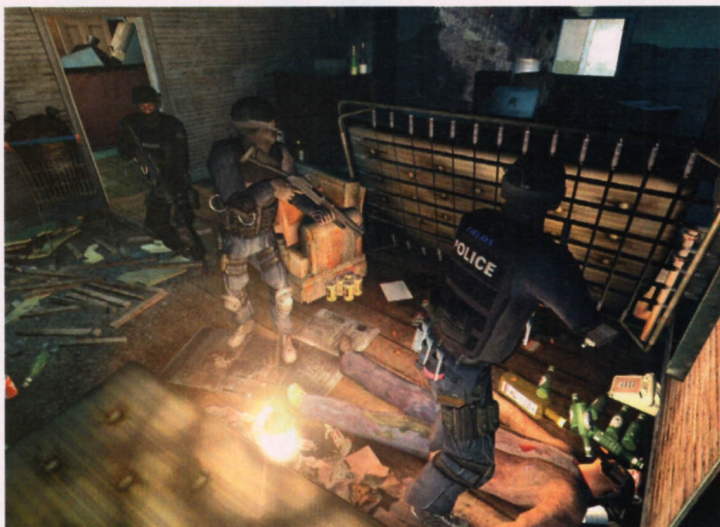
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gamespy



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"Keep looking. He must hide his porn mags somewhere."



"What do you mean they don't stock PC ZONE?"



"Right, who ordered the Kung Po Chicken?"

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Irrational Games
PUBLISHER VU Games
WEBSITE www.swat4.com
ETA April

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Co-op mode brings out the true nature of your friends' willingness to take your orders seriously
- Comprehensive command menu facilitates team communication
- VIP mode offers team deathmatch with a twist
- Realistic weapon usage and damage provides a change from the usual guns-blazing online action
- The tazer – funniest gun ever

CV



IRRATIONAL GAMES

We went into Irrational's history in detail last issue, but if you came in late to the party, here's a quick recap...

- 1997** It all kicks off as Ken Levine leaves Looking Glass Studios and starts up on his own.
- 1999** *System Shock 2* wins many plaudits from the pundits.
- 2002** *Freedom Force* is a minor hit.
- 2004** An expansion into Australia provides Irrational with *Tribes: Vengeance*, while Sierra sets the US team loose on *SWAT*.
- 2005** *Freedom Force vs The 3rd Reich* expands the franchise (see p48).

Law and disorder...

SWAT 4

The **PC ZONE** legal team suits up for some justice-dispensing action. **Paul Presley** calls for backup

"ARREST HIM, WILL!"

"He won't stay still!"
 "Where's he gone?"
 "GET DOWN! GET DOWN ON THE GROUND!"
 "Jamie, he keeps running off!"
 "Why are you arresting me? They're over there!"
 "PUT YOUR HANDS IN THE AIR AND DON'T MOVE!"
 "Stop him!"
 "Help... Help..."
 "Hold on..." The electrostatic crackle of a tazer shot fills the air. "Right, he's down. Cuff him."

Not strictly in keeping with proper police procedure perhaps, but a panicky civilian is more trouble than he's worth and at least it got the job done. Yes, this month we've been mostly playing the co-operative multiplayer mode in Irrational Games' simulation of being a gun-toting rozzar, *SWAT 4*.

Last month we were offered a hands-on session with the single-player game, with all the pepper balling, flashbanging

and optiwandding that entailed (check out issue 152 for the full story). This month, we took delivery of a more advanced version of the game, one that didn't have all the multiplayer modes greyed out and resolutely non-selectable. Our lunchtimes have never been the same since. Is the sun still yellow?

KEYSTONE KOPS

It's not just the random abuse of civilians that marks out the multiplayer game of *SWAT 4* as a potential work of comedy genius. Asthma fans are well catered for, with a wide variety of smoke grenades and pepper spray dispensers that, in the wrong hands (Sefton's), can result in fun-filled minutes spent coughing your lungs up after a badly thrown projectile.

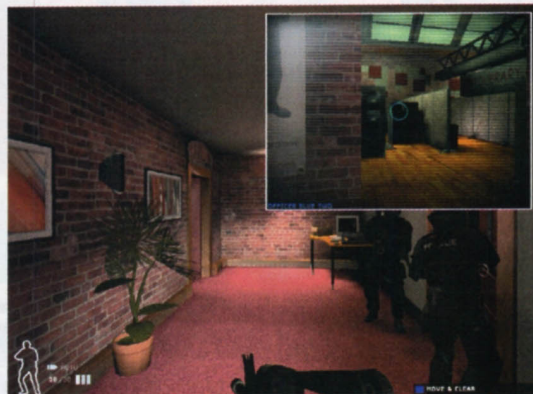
Then there's the near irresistible urge that fills any



PICTURE-IN-PICTURE

HOW YOUR FRIENDS SEE YOU

One of the more interesting features of the single-player game is the helmet-cam viewpoint that means you can see things from your team-mates' perspectives (and even control their actions to a small extent). The same device is present in multiplayer, minus the control options, in theory meaning you can coordinate your entry actions with your buddies on the other side of the room, but in reality simply providing an oddly existential method of seeing yourself being tasered in the backside by your so-called best friend. Which is nice.



Modern technology at its best.



"Ow, I think I got a splinter..."



Nich architrave.



"Cut the black wire? They're ALL black!"



"No, it's just a touch of shoulder elephantiasis. I'm seeing a doctor."

true gamer of salt when confronted with the rear end of your team-mate while you hold your tazer secondary weapon. Will spent about three whole minutes convulsing on the floor following that one. Although on the plus side, his quivering body served as a half-decent human shield to hide behind.

ON THE FLOOR!

Truly, most FPS merchants have missed a trick with their interminable sorties into alien deathmatch landscapes, evil terrorist lairs or WWII battlegrounds. For sheer entertainment value, nothing can top three of your mates storming into some Kwik-E-Mart style convenience store and shouting at petrified old women to hit the dirt lest you put the business end of your pump-action shotgun up their backside. Who says games don't let you live out your fantasies?

Of course, the life of a modern tactical response police officer isn't all laughs.

SWAT 4 does a bang-up of job of recreating the tension involved in storming a jewellery store filled with masked banditos. Hidden triggers set off thumpity-thump mood music that raises the hairs on your neck, and accidental discharge behind your team-mates after

"Nothing can top you and your mates storming into a Kwik-E-Mart and shouting at old women to hit the dirt"

you've just spent minutes creeping silently along a dark corridor can almost cause the older members of your gaming units to have coronaries (as we learnt from bitter experience – my fault this time).

All of which highlights the importance of good communication. Integral to a good co-op game of SWAT 4 is being able to tell your buddies exactly what sort of height they should jump to when you

tell them. The context-sensitive command menu from the single-player game is present and correct, but the need for a more coherent chain of command is still an issue that needs to be worked on prior to release. At present, everyone is free to issue commands left, right and centre, which more often than not just results in your hapless Optiwand operator (the sneaky under-door/round-corner camera device) running back and forth in a miasma of confusion.

That's the co-op game anyway. The rest of the multiplayer smorgasbord consists of competitive team action in the shape of VIP escorting, rapid deployment bomb defusals and standard cops vs

environment on your knees, shackled like a German sex tourist. It's not much fun for the hapless VIP either. Ho ho.

The Rapid Deployment mode is a simple variation on the point capture gameplay variant seen in many a team-based online shooter. Three to five suitcase 'dirty' bombs are randomly scattered about the map of choice, slowly ticking down to detonation. SWAT have to find and defuse the buggers. Suspects (the bad-guy teams) have to keep them ticking away, strangely giving you the chance to experience life through the eyes of a suicide bomber. Blimus!

POLICEMAN'S BALLS

SWAT 4 code is *this* close to being finished. What's left to come are one or two cosmetic tweaks and a tightening of the graphics engine (several texture rips are still visible, eliminating the tension of whether anyone is standing behind the door you're about to blow open – a legitimate take-down tactic as it happens).

The AI also needs a bit of a polish. Take the panicky citizen at the start, for instance. Was his refusal to stand still and be taken to safety until fried with voltage an accurate simulation of terror or just a fault? It's unclear, but come the finished product we'll at least have the evidence to see how hard the bug testers are working. Ha ha! Evidence. Do you see? **[PZ]**

robbers deathmatch-style shootouts. Even here though, SWAT 4 is a little different, with more points being offered to players who arrest their opponents than those who dispense justice through the medium of flying pellets of death.

We covered the VIP game last issue, although it's worth quickly reminding ourselves of the bizarre feeling that comes from being forced around a gaming



Warfare isn't only confined to land.

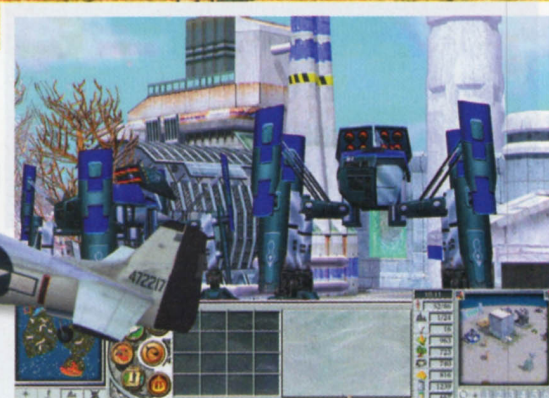
Conquer & multiply...

EMPIRE EARTH II

Martin Korda conquers the world for the glory of ZONE...



LAST
PREVIEWED
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The 14th Epoch enables you to build giant killer robots.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Mad Doc Software

PUBLISHER VU Games

WEBSITE

www.empireearth.com/empireearth2.jsp

ETA April

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's a bit like *Civilization*, only in real-time
- 30 per cent more troops and 80 per cent more buildings than *Empire Earth*
- 14 technological epochs
- Innovative multiplayer features
- Advanced AI

CV



MAD DOC SOFTWARE

In a very short space of time, the team has built up a fearsome reputation for creating quality games...

- 2001** *Star Trek: Armada II* proves to be one of the best *Star Trek* strategy games ever made.
- 2002** The team manages a rare feat in producing an expansion pack (*Empire Earth: The Art Of Conquest*) that's just as good as the original.
- 2003** Standalone multiplayer expansion *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* is by the far best thing about *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*.

IN THE LAST couple of issues we've written extensively about *Empire Earth II*'s single-player components, so today we're going to do something a little different. A little daring. Well, maybe not daring, but certainly different. Y'see, today we're going to talk mainly about the game's multiplayer features, which if you believe Mad Doc Software's CEO Ian Lane Davis, are themselves a little bit different from most other RTS games. Why? Over to Ian...

"There are a number of features in *Empire Earth II* that will make you think, 'Why didn't anyone think of that before?'" he explains. "For starters, there's a whole new multiplayer mode called *Sole Survivor*. Usually in multiplayer RTS games, a number of players form an alliance and when they've beaten everyone else, the game ends. However, after the alliance has achieved victory in *Empire Earth II*, the remaining players have to fight each other. This way, only one player can be the winner."

Keen to show us first-hand, Ian invites us to take part in a six-way multiplayer *Sole Survivor* skirmish game. Setting the game speed to the fastest setting so that we can experience as many of the 14 available Epochs as possible in the shortest time period, the hostilities kick off in the Stone Age.

GIVE PEACE A CHANCE

Within seconds, we receive a message from another player offering us an alliance. "There are two sorts of alliances, normal and timed," chirps Ian as we consider the proposal of peace. "Both kinds of alliance enable you to set border permissions and allow your ally to see everything you can. You can also trade resources and units and if you don't like what's being offered, you can offer a counter proposal. However, with a timed alliance you can't break the pact before the time runs out."

Given that there are six of us vying for control of the map, we opt to accept

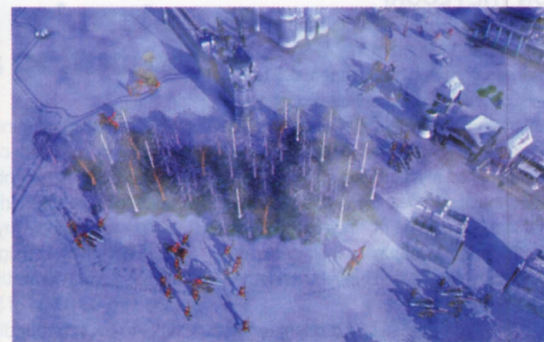
the half-hour alliance in order to buy ourselves some much needed research time. Then, sallying out of our city, we move into adjacent sectors (each map is divided into dozens of sectors which can be captured and built on in order to expand your empire – a bit like a real-time *Civilization*), our new holdings furnishing us with bountiful amounts of resources.

ARTS AND CRAFTS

Ian encourages us to start researching, as each Epoch sports 12 different crafts to be researched which are divided up into three tech trees: Military, Economic and Imperial. To progress to the next technological Epoch, you must research at least six different crafts and if you're the first player to research all four crafts of a specific tech tree in multiplayer, you're awarded a Crown. This then furberishes you with a five-minute bonus that can boost anything from the prosperity of your market place to the amount of damage that your units can inflict.



"Shall we take our shoes and socks off, sarge?"



Severe weather conditions can hinder your troops' progress.

LET'S MAKE HISTORY



Relive America's finest achievements. And its worst.

HISTORICALLY ACCURATE OR INTELLIGENTLY MARKETED?

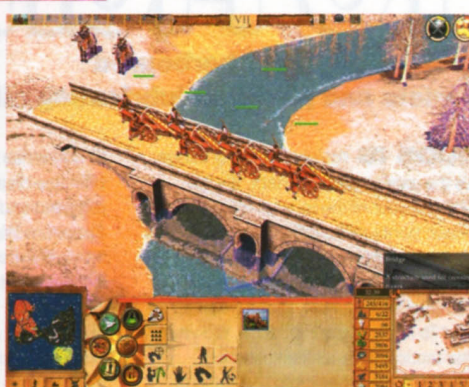
While most of our time was spent talking about and playing *Empire Earth II*'s multiplayer game, we did manage to get some time to talk to Mad Doc Software's CEO Ian Lane Davis about the single-player campaign too.

"There are three single-player campaigns," he explains. "The first is Korea, which covers the establishment of the nation and starts off with you controlling a historical hero from Korean history who must unite the tribes. The middle campaign is German, which depicts the establishment of Germany during the Middle Ages, all the way up to the 1800s. Here, you have to ally the land before the Polish invade you. The third campaign is American, which goes through from Roosevelt to the near future."

It's interesting to note that the three campaigns are centred on the three biggest RTS markets in the world – Korea with its burgeoning online community, Germany with its strategy-obsessed gamers and the USA, with the biggest gaming market in the world. Coincidence or clever marketing play? You decide.

To control a sector, you must first remove its existing inhabitants.

"We conquer the world and taste a truly innovative multiplayer RTS experience in the process"



Pass the detonator.



That's a whole lot of seamen.

This all used to be forests you know...

Having won the Military Crown and also having researched a couple of Economic crafts, we hit the Epoch Upgrade button and watch as both our buildings and soldiers morph into more advanced versions of themselves.

We continue to spread further into the map, and before long we're building universities and temples in every land – two buildings required to speed research – and charging up the Epoch ladder. Swords change to muskets. Muskets into rifles. Rifles into machine guns. Machine guns into tanks. As the final seconds of our peace agreement tick

down, our burgeoning society has been transformed into a superpower. Stealth fighters glide noiselessly above our sprawling cities while behemoth tanks roll through the streets. It's time for war.

ALL-OUT WAR

We cut through the fog of war like a scimitar through naked flesh, deeper into the unknown, hungry for conquest. Caterpillar tracks kick up plumes of dust as our army advances. Suddenly, we stop. There, stretching from the foreground to slightly behind it is a tiny, primitive Stone Age settlement. Bemused

resource-gathering Neanderthals turn to stare, animal bones in hands ready to repel us. They charge the strange metallic beasts that have invaded their lands, only to die under the tracks of my tanks and in the napalm clouds from my bombers.

I WILL SURVIVE

As the fires die down and our nation rebuilds the land with new, modern-day buildings, a new threat looms into view. Two-legged machines charge at our cities, just as our nation reaches the 14th and final Epoch. The battle for survival is brutal as robot kills robot, cyborg terminates cyborg, the war swinging backwards and forwards for the next half hour as sectors are won and lost by both sides. However, thanks to superior use of

the excellent Picture In Picture feature – which means we can bookmark our major cities and forces so that we can watch them and issue orders from a little window – we gain the upper hand by co-ordinating six simultaneous attacks on their major cities. Millions die, but victory is ours.

We conquer the world and taste a truly innovative multiplayer RTS experience in the process. *Empire Earth II*'s multiplayer options can be all-conquering, like a merciless king smiting his opponents and calling the vanquished to his banner. And if the single-player game can match the multiplayer's potential, then the balance of RTS power could be about to shift in a very dramatic way. [A+] www.maddoc.com



Lesson one: helicopters fly in the air.

**Honour. Courage.
Commitment. Quicksaves...**

CLOSE COMBAT: FIRST TO FIGHT

The only marine fantasies **Paul Presley** ever harboured involved dolphins, secluded inlets and plenty of lubricating oil

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Destineer Studios
PUBLISHER Take 2
WEBSITE www.firsttofight.com
ETA April

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Based on a training tool for actual US Marines
- Involvement of active service Marines throughout development
- Rigidly adheres to authentic military procedures and tactics
- Psychological mapping of the human will to cause realistic AI behaviour

2005 IS the year of many things. It's the year to drop the debt. It's the Chinese year of the rooster. It's the year slouch boots make a fabulous comeback. It's the year between 2004 and 2006. It's also, if *SWAT 4*, *Brothers In Arms*, *Battlefield 2* and, now, *Close Combat: First To Fight* is any indication, the year that tactical ultra-realism makes a sweeping comeback into the world of initial self-firing games.

In case you're in a hurry (and in this busy modern world of half-caf espresso lattes, instant food burger patties and colonic irrigation in your lunch hour, who amongst us can honestly say they aren't?)

I'll condense this preview into a handy bite-size chunk that can easily be digested and flushed out quickly: *Full Spectrum Warrior*'s attitude transferred into a first-person shooter mechanic. Simple, n'est-ce pas?

IT'S JUST A LITTLE TUBE

Look how quickly that passed through. Well, let's go deeper then. The basic concept is that *First To Fight* is very closely based around an actual training tool used by the US Marine Corps, giving you some indication of its realistic ambitions. Adhering strictly to the Ready-Team-Fire-Assist mantra practised by the elite American fighting force (four-man squads, each with a unique role, each complementing each other in the field), you control your squad as you perform various missions in a near-future Beirut invasion scenario.

Your role is to lead the team, while the game's advanced AI routines get on with making sure your squad-mates keep things real. Hence move orders come complete with covering fire, and take natural terrain cover into account. Fire solutions cover all the angles and make best use of your team's various weapons. Even the enemy reacts realistically,

Lesson two: guns are loud.

thanks to a psychological profile that takes into account how scared they're becoming in the face of your force's overwhelming superiority.

GO TO WAR

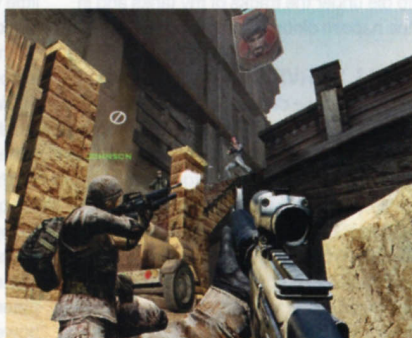
If it all sounds rather jingoistic and like some kind of soldier recruitment tool in sheep's clothing, well, Destineer Studios is keen to stress that it's simply a realistic portrayal of life as a Marine. Any contextual interpretations of the game's content is up to you...

It's certainly hectic, something that makes it feel authentic enough, but it's also a little linear and simplistic in its treatment of the 'enemy' in places. But there's still time for the rougher edges to be smoothed over, which is what you'd certainly hope for if this truly is being used to train real-life soldiers. **PCZ**

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Lesson three: recap lesson one.



Lesson four: a stylish pose is important.



The definitive Napoleonic
strategy game

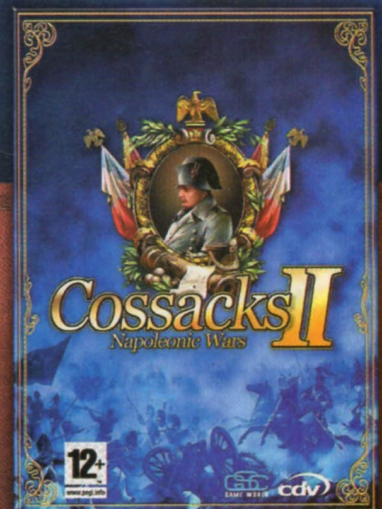
Cossacks II

Napoleonic Wars



www.cossacks2.com

PC CD





Nazi-bashing...

What the *Star Wars* Wampa ice creature did next.

FREEDOM FORCE VS THE THIRD REICH

Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No, it's *Jamie Sefton* wearing a pair of tattered Y-fronts outside of his trousers...

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Irrational Games
PUBLISHER Digital Jesters
ETA April
WEBSITE www.freedomforcegame.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Sequel to the 2002 cult superhero RTS
- Creates a colourful, tongue-in-cheek comic book world
- Customisable characters and multiplayer modes
- From the developer of *System Shock 2*

MARVEL AND DC Comics superheroes are everywhere at the moment – at the cinema, on TV, in newspapers and magazines. You can't even visit the deli of your local mini-mart without some minor comic book personality serving up your slices of ham and luxury cheese coleslaw. However, rather than using licensed characters, *Freedom Force vs The Third Reich* is stuffed with Irrational Games' own creations, such as the destructive metal-headed Manbot, and the rasping, beyond-the-grave revenge-seeking Tombstone.

"There's no way we could do all the cool moddable stuff if we were licensed," says Irrational's CEO Ken Levine. "We want to be making more games for hardcore

gamers that don't have publisher control. It's similar to an independent film. We'll plough all the money that we make from this one into another." Like a plot from a comic book, Irrational is ready to fight and build its own dynamic and funny alternative universe of Patriot City, free from the tyranny of big-money licensees and corporate interference. Kapow!

WAR ON TERROR

Freedom Force vs The Third Reich is the sequel to the well-received 2002 original, which zapped you into a colourful action-packed RPG, controlling a team of Energy X-powered heroes battling Lord Dominion and his twisted cronies. The story begins a year after the last game, and in a nutshell, involves *Freedom Force* travelling back in time from the 1960s to the 1940s to foil a dastardly plot involving the jackbooted Nazi menace.

In single-player, delivering orders to your heroes (not 'superheroes' but 'heroes' in the game – certain company lawyers are watching the team closely...) is faster than Superman with diarrhoea. Right-clicking on any character will bring up their health, along with a myriad of melee and ranged attacks, powered by Energy X, the secret element that gives the heroes their heroic skills. Examples of the fun you can have include the fiery El Diablo's Tongues of Flame attack, which torches foes accompanied with a cartoon "Fooooosh!" exclamation. There's also the beautiful, skimpily-dressed Eve's Swarm of Leaves that engulfs enemies in a whirlwind of discarded foliage.

You can control up to four characters at once, so to make sure you keep tabs on the frenetic on-screen action, Irrational gives you the option of pausing the game or even playing in super slo-mo. "Heroes

CV

IRRATIONAL GAMES

Co-founded by Ken Levine in 1997 after leaving Looking Glass Studios, Irrational has developed some of the PC's best-known games...

- 1999** *System Shock 2* is released to critical acclaim – check out last month's Games That Changed The World for the full story.
- 2002** The criminally-overlooked *Freedom Force* hits the shelves, grabbing 82 per cent and an Essential award in *PC ZONE* despite being rush-released.
- 2004** Irrational's Australian development studio unleashes the excellent *Tribes: Vengeance*, which receives 87 per cent and another Essential award from this very mag. Meanwhile, over in Boston, *SWAT 4* is also being finished off – check out the latest preview on page 54.



There are origin movies for every *Freedom Force* character.



Long-range attacks are best against the bigger foes.

ORIGINS OF A HERO

NUCLEAR WINTER PRESTIGE: 14901

STATS GP: 1790

| | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------|------|
| STR: 5 | VERY STRONG | 910 |
| SPO: 3 | NORMAL | 115 |
| AGL: 2 | CLUMSY | 115 |
| END: 6 | EXTREMELY HARDY | 760 |
| END: 5 | VERY POWERFUL | 360 |
| TOTAL GP VALUE OF STATS: | | 1790 |

ATTRIBUTES GP: 690

| | | |
|-------------------------------|-----|-----|
| INTELLIGENCE | 390 | |
| JUMPER | 300 | |
| TOTAL GP VALUE OF ATTRIBUTES: | | 690 |

BACK STATS POWERS INFO LOS COSTINGS

Construct characters from dozens of stats and attributes...

The newly-expanded character creator enables you to make your own hero and even customise their powers – right down to the actual in-game animation. First, you take a skin or mesh from any of the 80+ characters in the game, or download different ones from the Net. After deciding the look, you can build up the stats and attributes of your hero, including strength and agility, as well as abilities including wall-climbing, sensing danger or flying. “Weaknesses are also an important part of superheroes – kryptonite for example,” says Ken Levine.

INTERFERENCE PRESTIGE: 1760

MELEE LEVEL: 3

ANIMATION

| | |
|---------|--|
| MELEE 1 | |
|---------|--|

SPECIAL EFFECTS

| | |
|----------------|--|
| PX MATERIALIZE | |
|----------------|--|

START TIME: 0.150 SEC
TOTAL TIME: 1.000 SEC
NO. CONTACTS: 1

BACK ANIMATION AND PX ATTACK

...and create your own superpower attacks and animations.

“Having, say, glass bones, means you’re more vulnerable to crushing damage, but it gives you 400 extra points to spend on other stuff such as claws for more dangerous melee attacks.”

Finally, you can design your own attacks using a comprehensive weapons editor. “You could create a beam that re-animates the dead to become your slaves,” adds Levine, “or a heat-seeking grenade that hypnotises any enemies within a certain radius. I’m really excited to find out what the mod community will come up with.”

E.T. is no match for Freedom Force.



“I ain’t getting on no plane, fool.”

also spring into action, so they don’t get the crap beaten out of them,” says Levine. “We wanted a balance between the first *FF* and, say, *Dungeon Siege*, so that the characters fight and defend themselves, but they don’t do a very good job of it.”

SUPER-MODS

As well as ensuring you get a karate kick out of the single-player hero experience, Irrational is also fully committed to improving the multiplayer side of *FFvTTR*, with an in-game browser and special plot-driven online maps. “Usually the problem with multiplayer is

the lack of context,” continues Levine.

“Even if you play Assault mode in *UT2004*, when you have a sequence of events that happen, it’s all a bit random isn’t it? So we came up with story-based multiplayer, where everything is moddable and you can actually script the scenarios so they echo comic book situations.”

So, you can create a multiplayer map from scratch, complete with detailed back-story and custom characters, for balanced missions with very different sides. Scenarios could include your own original supervillain and three minions attacking the Freedom Force base, with

four heroes defending it; or a map where four heroes have to destroy different enemy objects in turn to save the world. Once you’ve added some artwork (and winning/losing messages), you can save it to your hard drive and post it on the Net for the thousands of hardcore *Freedom Force* fans to lap up.

Different types of games are also available including the usual deathmatch and arena modes, as well as a new addition called Tag, where each of the participants take a team and pit one character against each other at a time – rather like *Magic: The Gathering*. Plus, *Freedom Force vs The Third Reich* has The Rumble Room, which is basically a skirmish mode, with the ability to add bots, or have up to four players controlling four characters each over a LAN or the Internet.

FOR FREEDOM!

Yep, there’s something innately loveable about *Freedom Force vs The Third Reich*. Maybe it’s the fact that all the excellent character voices are performed by Irrational employees in a poky improvised recording studio? Perhaps it’s the ridiculously over-the-top stereotypes that populate the game, including the new 1940s heroes of Black Jack (stiff-upper-lipped Brit), Tricolour

(sassy chick wrapped in French flag) and Sky King (American rocketeer).

“All the embarrassing fake British, French and German dialogue is written by me,” says Levine proudly. “All the Germans say is ‘Achtung!’ and ‘Amerikaner Schweinhund!’.” We also like the colourful environments, decorated with dynamic lighting, destructible buildings, objects you can pick up and throw at enemies and sparkly superpower effects.

Actually, we reckon it’s the whole package that we’re drawn to, which is currently being expertly assembled with great passion and belief by Ken Levine and his minions, keen to avenge the hurt they felt after the enforced rush-release of the first game by their evil ex-publisher. Ker-Slap! We’ll discover whether *Freedom Force vs The Third Reich* is a superhero or supervillain in next month’s review. **PCZ**

“There’s something loveable about this game – maybe the ridiculously over-the-top stereotypes that populate it”



Minute Man uses his National Guard shield for protection.



REVIEWS

THE DEFINITIVE LOWDOWN ON ALL THE LATEST PC GAMES

THREE-HEADED MONKEY



■ ASSOCIATE EDITOR Jamie Sefton

▲ There are times, I admit, dear reader, when even yours truly gets a little cynical and jaded with videogames journalism. When you've just had to review an impenetrable Russian RTS that combines resource gathering with psychiatry, or you've just had to play another piss-poor videogame tie-in of a straight-to-video movie based on a time-travelling dog, you do occasionally forget why you got into the industry in the first place (apart from the free lager).

However, this month the entire ZONE team has been busy compiling our '50 Greatest PC Gaming Moments Ever' feature (see p30), and it was a timely reminder about why videogames are so magnificent, and – if I may be slightly *Late Night Review* for a moment – such a criminally-underestimated art form.

A headcrab scaring the crap out of you in an air duct in *Half-Life*. Scoring a goal in *PES4*. Pulling off a head shot in *UT*. *DE_Dust*. Creating a hero in *City Of Heroes*. Long-distance sniping in *Far Cry*. Dogfighting in *Elite*. Snuckey's. All of us reminiscing about our favourite bits in games, and struggling to even get the list down to a 100, never mind 50. And then to top it all I received an email from the legendary Ron Gilbert thanking us for voting *Monkey Island* number one. Fantastic. I reckon if you can't get excited when you receive a message from one of your videogame heroes, then it really is time to hang up the mouse and keyboard. Not just yet, though...

In fact, I've just had time to sort out the best review section this year, with a six-pager on our cover game *Brothers In Arms: Road to Hill 30* (page 64), C&C-style action RTS *Act Of War: Direct Action* (page 72), dark *Star Wars* RPG sequel *Knights Of The Old Republic: The Sith Lords*, mucky mag sim *Playboy: The Mansion* (page 84) and souped-up racer *GTR* (page 86). Onwards...



BROTHERS IN ARMS: ROAD TO HILL 30 64

Gearbox's WWII epic invades PC ZONE – turn to page 64 now!

THE ZONE SCORING SYSTEM

Some people (mainly games publishers) say that our scoring system is harsh. It's not. It's honest and built around the seemingly outdated idea that 50 per cent is an average score. Likewise, 70 per cent is a good score, anything above 80 per cent is excellent, and 90 per cent and above is a Classic (see below). Talking of Classic awards, don't expect to see one every issue as we don't chuck them around like confetti.

OUR REVIEWERS

We think our reviewers are the best in the business. Each one is a specialist in numerous genres and will have played every major release, so no game is judged in isolation. We also

make sure the right game gets reviewed by the right person, which means you won't see Steve Hill reviewing an RPG and we won't let Will loose on *FIFA Football 2005*. You can have your say on the games and our reviews as well. If you have a comment to make, please email your views to letters@pczone.co.uk and entitle your email 'Feedback'.

ONLINE REVIEWS AND MULTIPLAYER UPDATES

We review a lot of games before they go on sale and if there are no public servers running before we go to print, we won't second-guess how the game's going to play online. Instead, you'll find dedicated online reviews of all the major releases in our regular Online Zone section.

Online Zone is also the place where we review online-only games, mods and major updates of online games. Between the two sections, we've got every gaming angle covered!

OUR PCS

We test games on a variety of systems so we can report how they perform in the real world. All our reviewed games are played on the manufacturer's minimum specification, as well as our own top-end rig – the Area-51 from Alienware (below).



Only games that score 90 per cent or more receive the coveted Classic award. The best of the best.



The second tier award for games scoring between 80 and 89 per cent. Essential purchases.

MEET THE TEAM

QUESTIONS

1. What are you playing?
2. Which WWII character class would you be?



DAVE WOODS

World Of Warcraft, PES4

Front line: I wouldn't send my troops anywhere I wouldn't go myself. Unless it was scary...



JAMIE SEFTON

Freedom Force vs The Third Reich (Beta), PES4

Sniper, so I can lurk outside the PC ZONE office and assassinate Woods



DARWINIA
Polygons at the ready



PLAYBOY: THE MANSION
California dreaming



INDIE ZONE
Sound of the underground



REPLAY
Games for less

DEFINITIVE REVIEWS

64 **BROTHERS IN ARMS:
ROAD TO HILL 30**

70 **DARWINIA**

72 **ACT OF WAR: DIRECT ACTION**

76 **KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC II:
THE SITH LORDS**

80 **CONSTANTINE**

82 **THE SIMS 2: UNIVERSITY**

84 **PLAYBOY: THE MANSION**

86 **GTR**

88 **THE HOUSE OF
THE DEAD III**

90 **THE PUNISHER**

92 **PSYCHOTOXIC**

92 **DISCIPLES II:
GOLD EDITION**

93 **RUGBY 2005**

93 **PRO RUGBY
MANAGER 2**

94 **SKI RACING 2005**

94 **TRANSPORT
GIANT:
DOWN UNDER**

95 **ALEXANDER**

95 **MAJESTIC
CHESS**

96 **INDIE
ZONE**

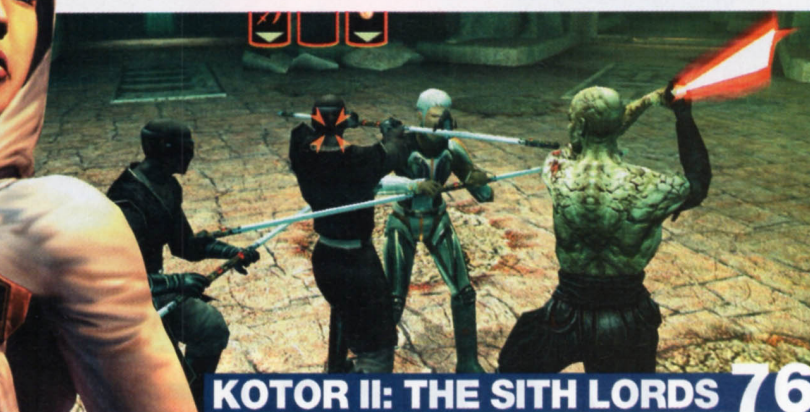
ALL THE BEST
NEW GAMES
FROM THE
INDEPENDENT
DEVELOPMENT
SCENE

98 **REPLAY**

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL,
FREELANCER, VEGAS:
MAKE IT BIG AND MORE



ACT OF WAR: DIRECT ACTION 72



KOTOR II: THE SITH LORDS 76



GTR 86



PAUL PRESLEY

City Of Heroes, World Of Warcraft, EverQuest II

I'd be a medal polisher for the top brass



WILL PORTER

Counter-Strike: Source, Pirates! The Chronicles Of Riddick

A sapper. Simply because I like the word so much and don't really know what it means



ANTHONY HOLDEN

Brothers In Arms and Thief: Deadly Shadows

Sniper, obviously. It appeals to my native cowardice



MARTIN KORDA

Rome: Total War and Vampire: Masquerade

Demolitions. With my bare hands of course



STEVE HILL

Project: Snowblind and PES4

Commander of hiding



RICHIE SHOEMAKER

KOTOR 2 (and a re-run of KOTOR 1)

WWII is so 2001. The Old Republic is where it's at...

BROTHERS IN ARMS: ROAD TO HILL 30



■ £34.99 | Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Gearbox Software | ETA: March | www.brothersinarmsgame.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM, a 32MB DirectX 9.0c-compliant 3D card and 5GB free HD space (Win 2000/XP only) **DESIRES** P4 2.5GHz, 1GB RAM, a 128MB 3D card and a broadband Internet connection

Anthony Holden has always felt like **PC ZONE** was a brotherhood in arms. Apart from the girls of course, and the lack of arms, and the fact that we all hate each other...

"THE MOST authentic WWII shooter – ever!" How many times have we heard this now? It seems every war-themed game on the block wants to be the most realistic and faithful, each toting scads of credentials and testimonials to prove its point. Clearly, they can't all be the most authentic, but I think the confusion comes from the fact that they all have a different idea about exactly what 'authenticity' is. Obviously we're not talking actual, 100 per cent verisimilitude here, or everyone involved would be vomiting bile and scratching their eyes out in horror. Uniforms, events and environments: yes. Pain, mutilation and seeing your buddies'

brains explode in your face: not so much. So really, what we're talking about is the faithful reproduction of *some elements* of a conflict, and the thing that separates games is which bits they decide are important and which can be glossed over.

IT'S THE REAL THING

Take *Call Of Duty*. Here you have an extremely 'authentic' WWII shooter, which recreates better than any other game the intensity of war, the sturm und drang of full-scale, combined arms conflict. On the other hand, you can drive a tank and fire its cannon at the same time, which is about as authentic as a fast food chicken teriyaki burger.

Brothers In Arms, while similar at a glance, has very different ideas about authenticity. It can't match *Call Of Duty* for sheer spectacle – it *doesn't* even try – but it refuses to gloss over things that most other games ignore. Things like the real tactics of combat – the way the war was actually fought rather than the way it's depicted in films. The sense of brotherhood of soldiers fighting side by side. And the fact that you need at least three people to man a tank. These things are the lifeblood of *Brothers In Arms*, and if any of them are even vaguely important to you, you're going to love it.

For the most part however, *Brothers In Arms* plays very much like any other WWII

INPERSPECTIVE

CALL OF DUTY

Reviewed Issue 136, Score 94%
For sheer gut-shaking, bone-jarring intensity, *COD* remains the king of war shooters. If you prefer a broader, more tactical experience, *BIA* is a superb alternative.

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR

Reviewed Issue 147, Score 80%
FSW was an interesting attempt to reproduce the tactics of squad-based combat, but lacked the other half of the equation – exciting first-person action. *Brothers In Arms* is the complete solution.



The 'mystery graphics engine' was eventually revealed as good old Unreal.

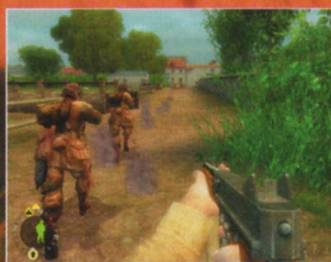
CAN I GET A REWIND?

BROTHERS IN ARMS BOASTS PLENTY OF REPLAYABILITY

One of the nice things about *BIA* is the way its mission structure and difficulty levels work. Rather than the usual PC approach, the game adopts a more console-centric attitude. 'Hard' level, rather than being ridiculously tough, simply requires you to apply a bit more patience and tactical nous during the battles. What's more, you're positively encouraged to replay the game on the higher difficulties, as each completed mission unlocks new 'making-of' and background information for you to peruse at your leisure. There are positively reams of this stuff, of varying degrees of interest, but anyone with a competitive streak will want to see every last bit.

Luckily, the game merits a repeat viewing. The nature of the tactical exchanges means you often find yourself wanting to 'perfect' a specific sequence, so you won't mind in the slightest if you have to give it another blast for the sake of a crappy archive photo. Honest.

Your AI chums are highly self-sufficient, but need a bit of direction.



Did we mention it looks pretty nice as well?



What's the only thing better than a tank? Two tanks.

shooter. You run around shooting Germans, ducking behind hedgerows, clearing villages, blowing up tanks and generally having a jolly good time of it. The setting too is

"The environments, weapons, weather and even the moon cycles are historically accurate"

familiar. The game kicks off on D-Day, as you and your homies in the 101st Airborne prepare to land in German-occupied Normandy. Being paratroopers, you do of course arrive by 'chute, which fortunately negates any possibility of

another Omaha Beach run. The rest of the game covers the crucial week following D-Day, as the invasion forces desperately try to maintain their foothold on the French

mainland and hold off the rallying Nazi horde.

Your squad is tasked with a series of vital support roles such as clearing fields for Allied glider landings, destroying tactically significant bridges and clearing villages of anti-

tank gubbins. Which, according to historical records, is exactly what the 101st Airborne, 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment did do.

Here then is Exhibit A in *Brothers In Arms'* comprehensive claim to authenticity. Not only are all the missions based on historical data, but the environments, weapons, weather and even the moon cycles are reproduced with exacting precision. None of this has much bearing on gameplay, but it's tremendous news for spotters and war buffs. Of more interest to the common man is the default setting without a reticule,

forcing you to aim down the sights if you want any degree of accuracy, and the fact that there are no health packs (health is restored at the start of each mission) or quick-saves (checkpoints only, bub).

KEEPIN' IT REAL

However, while all this gives the game a nice gritty edge, the thing that really separates *BIA* from other WWII shooters is its focus on real combat tactics. Developer Gearbox was keen to avoid the 'one-man army' approach that afflicts so many other games, and so places you in command of a squad of US troops, dubbed 'Baker's Dozen'

after your alter-ego Matt Baker. Actually, you're just a grunt at first, taking orders from your platoon leader, but soon enough you have three men under your control, then three men and a tank, then eventually two teams of three. And while lone wolf heroics will get you through the first few missions intact, you soon find that these human resources are the key to your survival.

Luckily, it's dead simple. When it comes to squad-level infantry manoeuvres, tactics have changed little in the last 2,000 years (so we're told), and they're almost insultingly basic. First,



You against the tank. Don't fancy your chances, frankly...



Smoking in a tank = bad.

you find your enemy – preferably before he finds you. Next, you 'fix' your enemy by laying down suppressing fire and preventing his escape. Third, you flank your enemy by sending part of your force around the side to a more advantageous position, and then you finish him off by firing on his now hopelessly exposed hindquarters.

HEADS UP

Until recently, war shooters mostly concentrated on the first and fourth aspects of this formula, skipping the tricky middle bits in favour of a corridor approach to combat. Games such as *Call Of Duty* expanded this vision to take in some 'fixing', giving

enemies an awareness of their own vulnerability and thus enabling them to be suppressed.

Brothers In Arms completes the picture, and it does so with a device called Situational Awareness. It works a bit like this. As soon as you spot an enemy you press a key, pausing the action and sending the camera swooping to a third-person vantage above the battlefield. This view, while not strictly realistic, represents all

nervously, so I'll set your mind at rest. You don't use the third-person view to give orders. This is not an RTS – there are no waypoints, no clicking and dragging, no command rose. You're basically just having a look around in this mode, scouting for channels and pathways to use in flanking manoeuvres. Got it?

The actual squad commands are given in the heat of battle and they number four

you want to just set them all to 'follow', you can do that too. Take it from me, a devout opponent of clunky tactical games like *Rainbow Six*: it could not be any easier.

Despite its simplicity however, the system is remarkably powerful. Your squad is blessed with extremely robust AI, enabling them to look after themselves in most situations and always seek the best cover no matter

"Squad AI is robust – and if you ask the impossible, they tell you where to go"

the information available to you as squad leader. It's like a 3D map, showing the locations of all your troops, any tactical objectives, and most importantly, the location of enemy units visible to you or your men. From here, you can jump around to focus on points of interest and zoom, tilt or pan for a better view.

ACTION FIRST

Now, if you're an FPS diehard, I can see you might be fidgeting

in total. Yes, just four. To activate squad commands, you simply press the right mouse button, which brings up an arrow indicator. Drop the arrow on the terrain to make your boys go there, drop it over an enemy to make them shoot on that location, and hold right mouse and press left to make them assault a position. Your squads always act as a discrete unit, so there's no need for individual management; and if





Full Spectrum Warrior meets COD. And Band Of Brothers...

where you stick them. If they can't see their designated target, they shuffle around until they can – and if you ask the impossible they tell you where to go. Admittedly, they're not 100 per cent trustworthy, and you often find yourself doing the most dangerous tasks, but hey – that's what being in charge is all about. (Don't be stupid... – Ed)

HARD AS NAILS

With this level of AI in place you can perform some pretty tidy manoeuvres. The most basic is to set a fire-team up somewhere where they can lay down cover-fire, then head off on your own to do the flanking. Fortunately, you always know when the enemy is cowering like a frightened kitten, as they all have a suppression indicator above their heads (though you can disable this if you're really hard).

Once you get a second team under your command – be it a tank or an assault team bristling with grenades and SMGs – the tactics really start to get interesting. Pincer movements, suppress-and-snipe, mad rushes – all these and more become valid ploys, and the satisfaction of success that much greater.

TICTACS

All things considered, it's an excellent system. Poring over the tactical overhead view, the game often feels more like *Combat Mission* than *Call Of Duty*, but the balance is always up to you. As the game progresses, you quickly learn which tactic is going to work best in what situation and begin to dish out orders with more speed and confidence. By the game's halfway point, you really feel like you belong in charge of these sorry fellows.

Unfortunately, the game doesn't entirely share this confidence. In fact, it seems almost to flinch



The tactical aspect becomes invaluable. Can we ever go back?

KILLER TANK

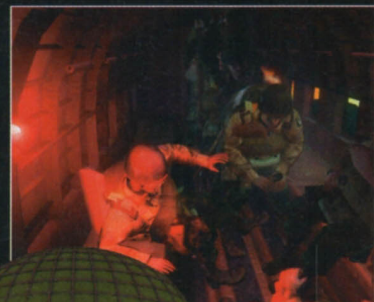


When you first get your hands on a tank, it's quite wonderful.

TANKS MEAN BUSINESS IN BROTHERS IN ARMS

One thing Gearbox was adamant about when making *Road To Hill 30* was that the tanks would be exceedingly dangerous. None of this one grenade and they blow nonsense – these tanks are the real deal. I actually got a little annoyed at the game a couple of times because the tanks kept killing me, despite the fact that I was hiding. Hiding, you understand. Protected. Behind some, er, wooden crates. OK... So maybe I wasn't as sheltered as I could have been, but those cartons would have protected me in any other WWII game. Not so *Brother In Arms*.

In this game, the only way to stop a tank is with another tank, or a lot of hits from an anti-tank weapon. Either that, or an extreme act of stupidity that involves sneaking round the back of the vehicle, popping open the hatch and dropping in a live grenade. Actually, this technique is quite easy once you've got the knack for it, which slightly detracts from the fear factor, but is also extremely cool. So I guess it's a fair trade.



The cow paratroopers weren't a huge hit.



MISSED OPPORTUNITY



HE MIGHT BE HEAVY, BUT HE AIN'T MY BROTHER

One of the key selling points of *BIA* is the way it builds upon the brotherhood of soldiers in combat, creating characters you (supposedly) care about and bond with through the course of the game. Unfortunately, it falls completely flat. Sure, each of your squad members has a name and one or two distinguishing traits, but you'd honestly be hard-pressed to name any of them by the time the credits roll.

One of the problems is that they die repeatedly throughout the game. Or rather, they are incapacitated, only to be brought back to life in the next mission. To be fair, this is quite a good way of handling NPC deaths – infinitely preferable to *Call Of Duty*'s indestructible fellows, but it still makes them a very disposable commodity.

What's more, you never actually converse with your buddies. You overhear their conversations and Baker talks about them in the prosaic pre-mission voiceovers, but you never actually interact with them (except to hurl orders). This is in stark contrast to something like *Half-Life 2*, where there's no way you could get through the game without knowing the characters inside out.

Ultimately then, the brotherhood stuff is a bit forced. You don't care about the characters, you don't bond with them and you don't feel bad when they die. In fact, I'd have to say *Men Of Valor* pulled this trick off better – and that's a real shame.



"No no, don't tell me, it'll come to me in a minute... it's Trevor isn't it?"



Of course, there's still plenty of joy to be found here, and much of it is down to the excellent level design. The layouts are overtly simple at first, with undefended pathways that scream 'flank here, idiot!', but they soon warm up nicely, and some of the later, bullet-riddled levels require a good deal of forward planning.

One convenient advantage is that the terrain is ready-built for small-scale tactical challenges. Aside from the bits flattened by bombs, Normandy is defined by what's called bocage: a lightly wooded landscape of fields and narrow roads, criss-crossed with thick hedgerows that can't be breached by infantry – ideal for channelling movement and building tactical mazes. Elsewhere, you have towns riddled with alleys, barns and graveyards – all of which make for a terrain rich in tactical possibilities.

Unfortunately, while you're given freedom to explore these possibilities, the Hun most definitely is not. In contrast to the excellent friendly AI, the enemy AI is highly scripted and predictable. Enemies rarely have the freedom to move around a level as the battle dictates, either staying put or moving within very narrow

from giving you too much responsibility, keeping the tactical palette tantalisingly basic throughout. With a limit of two squads or tanks under your command, things eventually become repetitive, and it's exasperating that you're not trusted enough to go further. Similarly, *BIA* takes far too long to ease you into the action at the outset, and doesn't really give you full rein until the sixth or seventh mission.

OVER HERE!

Ultimately, *Brothers In Arms* fails to take full advantage of its own, excellently conceived formula. As a player who prefers shooters, I find it a bit bizarre to be sitting here and demanding more tactical sophistication, but with a system this intuitive I just can't help myself.



The radio-controlled tank course was a big hit with the troops.



SECOND OPINION

PAUL PRESLEY

Unlike the good ship Holden, SS Prezzlewick has quite a taste for the slower, more tactical approach to the FPS genre – *Hidden & Dangerous* and *Operation Flashpoint* are just two examples. Consequently, I was excited by *BIA*'s promises of tactical overtones. Ant has a point about the game's lack of ambition, but I did find myself having to think a little more than usual for a FPS, which is never a bad thing. What's most unforgivable for me is the lack of real enemy AI – for *BIA* the term 'fixed encampment' means exactly that. I can't fault *BIA*'s atmosphere, but I too wish there had been a bit more to the strategic side of things.

time while the Americans prey on them with sniper rifles. In another, the Americans have to locate and evacuate a document case in a town choked by obscuring fog.

LOOKS FAMILIAR

In many ways *BIA*'s multiplayer game is similar to *Enemy Territory* – objectives are much the same, even identical in some cases. The big difference is the inclusion of AI squad-mates, which casts a very different complexion on proceedings and makes for some uniquely enjoyable tactics. Controlling the map and maintaining superior visibility often takes precedence over blind aggression, while laying a successful ambush with your troops is particularly gratifying.

Sadly, the ten multiplayer maps are somewhat small and unexciting compared to the likes of *ET*. There are two or three superbly crafted examples, but some pretty mediocre efforts as well, and this is sure to hurt the game's reception online. Hopefully the



The Ground Force team were taking a new approach.



"Of course I feel the same Brad, but can we talk about it later?"

Crouching Nazis, hidden Tiger Tanks.

"BIA is not just fun, it's a technically excellent and innovative piece of work"

boundaries. As such, they're never able to out-flank you, no matter how many times you show them how, and this makes it a very one-sided affair, tactically speaking.

BROTHERS ONLINE

Fortunately, Gearbox has at least a partial answer to this, as *Brothers In Arms* comes with a bold and beautiful multiplayer mode that incorporates many of the tactics of the single-player game. To wit, each player arrives with a squad of three AI units in tow, and games consist of either one-on-one or two-on-two matches. When

you die you switch to the next member of your squad, after which you respawn a whole new squad back at base. Cleverly, you can still use Situational Awareness (though of course it doesn't pause the action), which means you can locate enemies visible to your squad, as well as to your teammate and his squad (in 2v2 games at least).

Each map offers a very different style of play, with a range of different objectives and parameters. In one instance, the Germans have to get a package to the other side of a village within an allotted

innovative nature of the mode will be enough to carry it, as it definitely deserves a look-in. As always, we'll be doing a full multiplayer review in Online Zone when the servers go live.

NICE PACKAGE

Needless to say, the multiplayer is just a small part of the total *Brothers In Arms* package, and it's a package we think is highly deserving of praise. Gearbox's tactical shooter is not just great fun, it's a technically excellent and innovative piece of work that takes some bold design risks and slam-dunks pretty

much every one. It may not have the flashy production values or grand scale of a *Call Of Duty*, but it establishes a tactical-action formula that trounces the opposition for functionality and ease of use, and the results are never short of compelling. As a first effort, *Road To Hill 30* is pretty damn good – if Gearbox can just build on this, the next *BIA* will almost certainly be a classic. **PCZ**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Excellent, intuitive tactical system
- ✓ Highly replayable
- ✓ Gritty realism
- ✓ Unique multiplayer game
- ✗ Tactical side could have been developed further
- ✗ Enemy AI a bit wooden
- ✗ Not much brotherhood

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A triumphant combination of brains and brawn



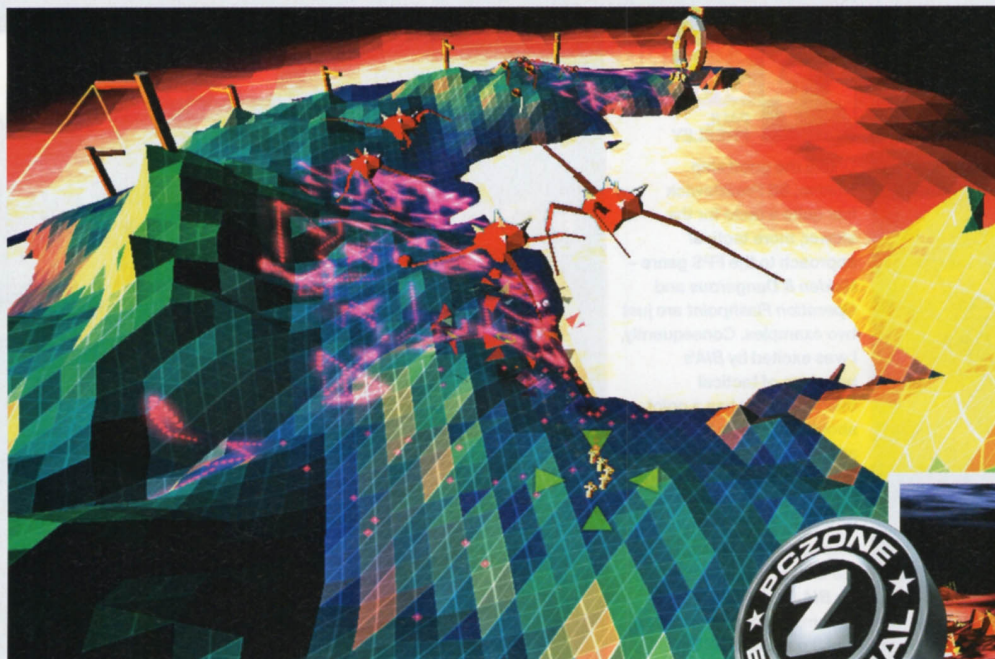
The power of yoga.



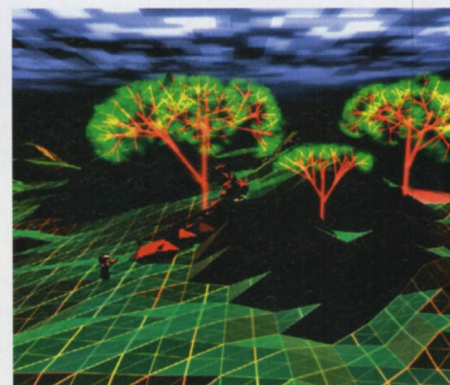
Rat-a-tat-tat!



Nice shrubbery.



Pretty in pink and out to kill you.



There's something nasty in the garden.

DARWINIA



■ £29.99 | Pub: Introversion Software | Dev: Introversion Software
ETA: Out Now | www.darwinia.co.uk

REQUIRES 600MHz PIII, 128MB RAM, GeForce2 graphics card DESIRES 1.6GHz P4, 256MB RAM and a GeForce4 card

Rhianna Pratchett hails the indie gaming evolution

THE IDEAL scenario for future games production is that developers stop pissing about with the handful of genres that they cling to like a drowning man to driftwood, and forge ahead creating new and wondrous ones. So it's a rather sorry state of affairs that Introversion Software (a tiny self-publishing indie developer) is attempting to move things forward – firstly with *Uplink* and now with *Darwinia*, while much of the industry wallows in mediocre rip-offs.

GENRE, WHAT GENRE?

Darwinia is quite hard to sum up in terms of current genres, since it looks like a semi-traditional 3D strategy game, but plays more like *Syndicate* or *Cannon*

Fodder, with stylish pseudo-retro visuals that make the game look like something the light-cycle guys from *Tron* played during their lunch break.

What you have here is a whole digital world, created by one Dr Sepulveda (a Clive Sinclair-like inventor) as a method of studying AI. But this once serene habitat of passive Darwinians has fallen foul of a virus, that has spread rapidly and laid waste to most of Darwinia. Your job is to use Sepulveda's basic military programmes to fight back the virus and its mutations, and restore harmony to the little flat green folks.

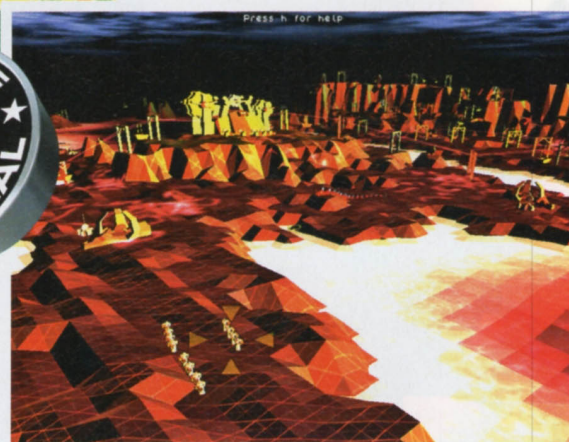
Because there are no resources to speak of, all your

units, which mostly consist of squads (fighters) and engineers (they repair buildings and collect souls), are expendable.

You can run three programs at a time and control weapons usage through a kind of gesture recognition screen. Although it seems a little daunting at first, the gestures become second nature after a while, and it has to be said that it's very generous towards wobbly mouse movements.

POLYGON PERFECTION

The level design of *Darwinia* is beautifully constructed, as is what you discover about the Darwinians' fragile society. However, it's not without bugs



Summoning units is much easier than it looks.

and some annoying pathfinding issues that sometimes mean that your squads get stuck in the landscape, or trundle to their deaths in the digital lava, rather than actually going around it.

Still, there's nothing quite like this. Introversion has given enough of a world to pleasure the senses, but not too much to remove the role of your own imagination. It's hard not to feel sympathy when you hear the Darwinians' bleepy screams of terror as the computer-generated enemies pursue them, and the pink viruses keep snaking across the back of your eyelids when you go to sleep.

It's not perfect. As I say, there are issues that occasionally make the gameplay frustrating, but overall it's challenging and

fun. Furthermore, it has its own unique style that typifies the very best in indie development, and means it can more than compete with the bigger guns. Someone please give these guys a lot of money. **VE**

INPERSPECTIVE

UPLINK

Reviewed Issue 113, Score 70%
Like *Darwinia*, this is another piece of impressive programming from the boys at Introversion. Retro in a kind of 1995 *Hackers*-the-movie way.

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

Reviewed Issue 123, Score 90%
Even though this is completely different from *Darwinia* in every conceivable way, it's also some traditional RTS action from the masters, complete with a nice mythological theme.



What videogames of the future were supposed to look like!

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Beautifully designed
- ✓ Innovative gameplay
- ✓ Challenging
- ✗ Dodgy pathfinding
- ✗ A few small bugs

84

Back to the future

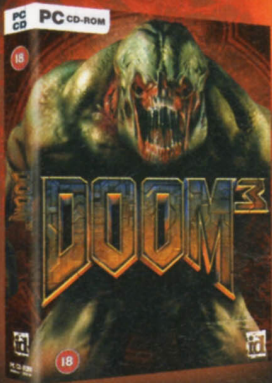
TRUE EVIL NEVER DIES



DOOM³

EXPANSION PACK

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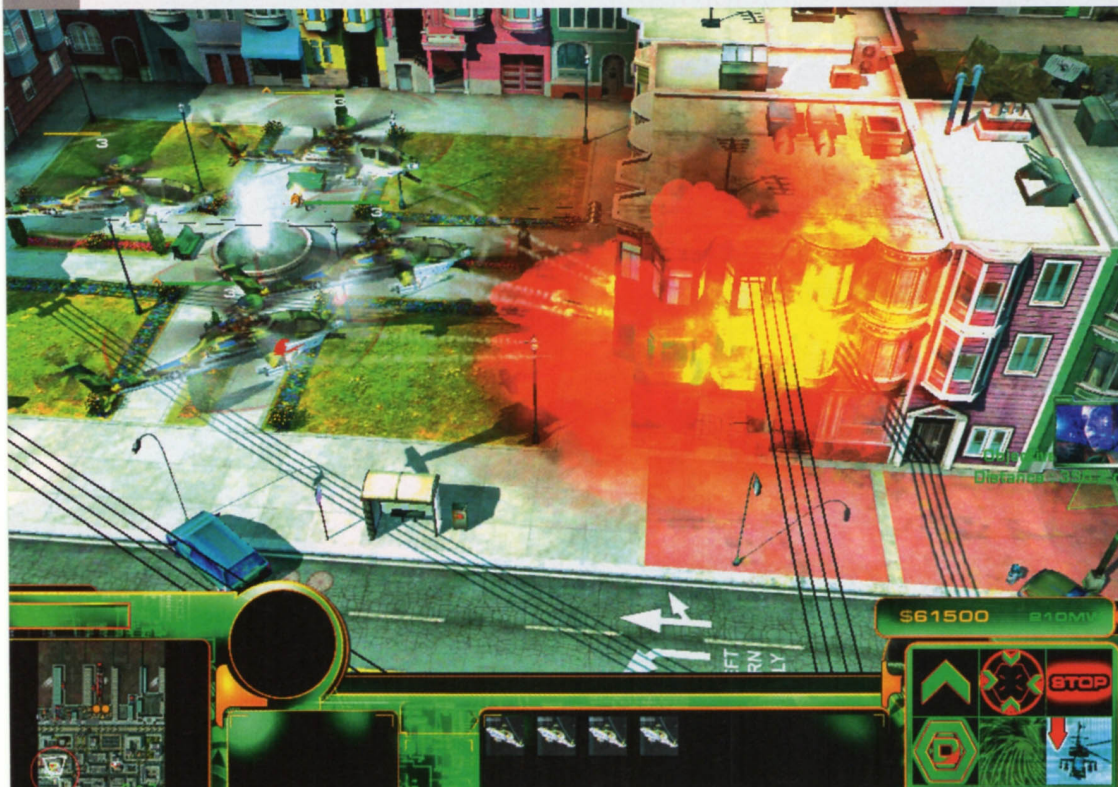
nerve

Distributed By

ACTIVISION[®]



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The US army goes for the softly, softly approach.

ACT OF WAR: DIRECT ACTION

■ £34.99 | Pub: Atari | Dev: Eugen Systems | ETA: March 18 | www.atari.com/actofwar

REQUIRES P4 1.5GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB DirectX 9.0c-compliant 3D card with full hardware T&L (does not support GeForce4 MX)

DESIRES P4 2.5GHz, 1GB RAM, a 128MB 3D card and a broadband Internet connection

Anthony Holden's lucky if he even gets out the house these days, so he's more than up for a bit of direct action

INPERSPECTIVE

ROME: TOTAL WAR

Reviewed Issue 148, Score 93%

The greatest strategy game of our age, but resolutely hardcore and a stickler for historical accuracy. If contemporary units and straightforward fun are more your bag, try *Act Of War*.

GROUND CONTROL 2

Reviewed Issue 143, Score 84%

Same score, different ethos. If you prefer all-out action to base building and resources, GC2 is an excellent option with a decent sci-fi storyline.

MARRYING old-skool RTS action with an explosive cinematic storyline, *Act Of War* is perhaps best described as 'Command & Conquer goes to Hollywood'. The plot reads like one of those embossed military paperbacks your dad reads, full of power-crazed Russian tycoons plotting to overthrow governments and terrorists attacking oil rigs in the desert. (No surprise

then, that the story was penned by blockbusting thriller hack Dale Brown.) If it really was a film it would be macho action fluff of the worst kind, but as a game it's a very different story. Here, the formulaic material is forgivable, not only because it's actually kind of fun, but because it provides the backbone for a genuinely outstanding RTS.

Good thing really, as the storyline in *Act Of War* frankly does not bear repeating. It's very silly and implausible, but suffice it to say the

themes are global terrorism and tensions over oil reserves and the style is hard-nosed Hollywood techno-thriller. After a brief scuffle in the Middle East, the game kicks off in London – The Mall and Grosvenor Square recreated with at least partial accuracy – and takes in locations such as Capitol Hill, downtown San Francisco and the Egyptian desert. There's no shortage of substance here, with a 14-mission solo campaign (split into 32 chapters), a robust skirmish mode and the usual online qualifications.

And it all looks absolutely delightful. The graphics are rich and meticulously detailed; the maps are large and packed with furniture – often housing hundreds of destructible buildings and dense foliage. The zoom range too is superb, allowing you to

close right in to see the grimaces on your enemies' faces, and the effects are suitably extravagant.

NUTS AND BOLTS

As big as it is on spectacle however, perhaps the finest thing about *Act Of War* is the way it simply gets all the basics right. Starting with the *C&C/Red Alert* template, the game tweaks, expands and eschews as it sees fit, keeping only those things that have proven their worth over time. So, you have classic base building, with a familiar assortment of barracks, vehicle platforms, defence turrets and so on. However, to remove the monotony of the building process, base building is semi-automated, with essential buildings often already in place or quickly built for you once a perimeter is established.

You have a single resource – US dollars – but it can be gathered in several ways. One is



Ambulances emit a cool healing aura.



Bit bloody sunny innit?



This is sure to put your council tax up.





You can practically count the notches on their AK-47s.



Snipers automatically take up the best vantage points.



Nice camouflage, buddy.



Skirmish mode is very much a traditional RTS affair.



Best not to plough your medical helicopter into a ditch.

SHIELD READY

SPOILER ALERT: GAME NOT ACTUALLY REALISTIC

If you've been following the progress of *Act Of War* at all, you'll be aware that the game sells itself on its 'highly realistic recreation of authentic combat situations', or something like that. Imagine my surprise then, when a third of the way into the game I came across the so-called SHIELD units – essentially mecha-units with armoured exoskeletons. Now, maybe I'm a little bit behind with military technology, but I haven't seen too many of these bad boys running the streets of Fallujah on CNN, and I'd have to say, it seems a little far-fetched. After that, the invisible tanks didn't surprise me at all...



Straight out of a Japanese comic book.

by drilling oil and trucking it to a refinery, but to take the pain away this always occurs within the perimeter of a base camp. Other ways include capturing financial institutions, rescuing captured soldiers and taking enemy POWs. The latter is particularly interesting, and forms part of what the developer calls 'human resource management'. The idea is to give you more

There are countless other game mechanisms I could cite, and while few of them are entirely new ideas, all are implemented with the same elegant simplicity. The healing radius of ambulances, the shortcut button to find snoozing constructor units, the way DEFCON levels are used to divide the research tree – all add to the game's general sense of

offers up a challenging new set of objectives and constraints. One level takes you straight from a scene of relatively open desert combat to the narrow, ambush-strewn lanes of an oil refinery, forcing you to adapt quickly to the new surroundings. Another denies you access to constructor units just as you're starting to rely a lot on familiar infrastructure.

"It all looks absolutely delightful – the graphics are rich and meticulously detailed; the maps are large and packed with furniture"

options than just 'dead' or 'not dead', and encourages you to heal injured friendlies, repatriate downed pilots and capture as many enemies as possible. POWs earn you dollars, but they can also be interrogated for information about enemy placement, making them the equivalent of a spy satellite.

functionality and intelligence. Even things like pathfinding and camera control are pleasingly difficult to fault.

BUILDING COMPLETE

There's also a nice sense of variety in the level design. Tactics are exposed naturally and gradually, as each new level

Admittedly, the tactics on offer are not the most complex. 'Assault with overwhelming force' is often your best option, and not necessarily discouraged by the game, especially in the early stages. However, there are plenty of subtleties to discover as well. Infantry units, for example, can be loaded into



Designating air strike targets...



"Come out Camilla, we know you're in there..."



This is the voice of the Mysterons...

SPLICE OF LIFE

ACT OF WAR RENDERS RTS AS CINEMA

To keep the plot tearing along nicely the game is shot through with high-octane FMV clips, decidedly B-grade in nature, but as such vastly superior to the Z-grade stuff perpetrated by Westwood in the '90s. These live action clips are skilfully interwoven with gameplay footage and CG elements to create a striking link between the story events and the in-game action. It's been tried before, but it actually works pretty well in this case thanks to the quality of the in-game graphics.



Task Force Talon, ready for duty.



"Now will you listen? Reduce my gas bill!"

"Act Of War takes the RTS old-school formula and enriches it in countless cool ways"



"Kill, kill!"



Basic, but in a good way.



Send in the cavalry.

buildings to give them protection and elevation, something that's often essential to clearing tight urban areas. At the same time, snipers can be used to take out enemies who would otherwise be hidden inside structures – not to mention that all the buildings in the game are destructible. In open terrain maps, a similar effect can be gained by hiding units in trees.

URBAN ASSAULT

Beyond this, the game simply reinforces the most basic tactics of real urban warfare. The full gamut of combined arms units

must be deployed to take an enemy position, as each has its own set of vulnerabilities. Tanks, for example, are useless against an enemy-held stronghold unless supported by infantry – one terrorist with an RPG can make mincemeat of your heavy armour in no time. Air bombardment is a wise precursor to any rolling attack, but anti-air defences are best dealt with by mortar teams and heavy snipers.

It definitely takes time for these factors to emerge, and one major criticism is that the game takes so damn long to get up to speed. For the first four or five levels I was convinced the game was all flash and no substance, and it was only with the emergence of the SHIELD units (see 'Shield Ready', page 73) that things started to get interesting. After that, *Act Of War* grew on me the more I played it.

Saying that, there are a few issues that need mentioning. For a start – that familiar gripe – the enemy AI is a little predictable, and there is a certain lack (or at least unevenness) of challenge as a result. It's also surprisingly easy to lose units, especially in the more rubble-strewn areas of the maps, and you have to be extremely conscientious with your unit management. On a pettier note, the icons in the build menus are terrible – not at all illustrative of their purpose – and there's an occasional bit of slow-down evident in big battles on minimum spec PCs.

As for the skirmish (or engagement) mode, it's a

resolutely traditional affair, with 18 run-of-the-mill maps all turning more or less on a compromise between security and proximity of resources. While it's perfectly playable and sound, it pales next to the spectacle and excitement of the main campaign, and is more of a side salad than a second helping of meat. Hopefully the online game will prove more interesting – see Online Zone in a couple of issues' time for a full report.

Needless to say, none of these complaints is a deal-breaker. *Act Of War* takes the old-school RTS formula and enriches it in countless cool ways, using the lessons of the past decade to create a single-player campaign that's as valid and exciting as anything else in the genre. Add production values to make EA sweat bullets and you've got yourself a very tasty proposition indeed. **PC**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Stunning visuals and high production values
- ✓ Strong (if ridiculous) storyline
- ✓ Gets all the RTS basics right
- ✓ Some nice innovations, especially 'human resource management'
- ✗ A few dull levels, especially at the beginning
- ✗ Tactically simple

84

Old-school and loving it

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NINTENDO DS™

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC II: THE SITH LORDS

£34.99 | Pub: Activision | Dev: Obsidian/LucasArts | ETA: Out Now | www.kotor2.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

The Sith strike back, 4,000 years before their cinematic revenge, and the only person in their way is *Richie Shoemaker*. Oh dear...



"Who forgot to pack the canvas part of the tent?"

IMPERSPECTIVE

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

Reviewed Issue 137, Score 94%

Sadly the first game has yet to be released at a budget price, which is perhaps unsurprising given the release of the sequel - but then it remains worthy of its full price for being the best RPG since *Deus Ex*.

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

Reviewed Issue 118, Score 91%

If you're a traditionalist when it comes to role-playing you might prefer this AD&D effort, a prior release from *KOTOR* coders BioWare. Intriguingly, *Sith Lords* developer Obsidian is crafting this sequel too.

STAR WARS GALAXIES

Reviewed Issue 138, Score 73%

If online role-playing is more your thing, there are a handful of games more deserving of your credit card details. But if it absolutely has to be a *Star Wars* game, then this will probably do the trick.

IT'S BEEN overstated by press and publisher alike that *Sith Lords* is *KOTOR's The Empire Strikes Back*. They said the same thing about *Attack Of The Clones* too; the prequel sequel that was supposed to

lead us bleakly into *Episode III*. In truth, *Spaceballs* had darker moments. Here though, the comparison between game and film is apt, for not only is *Sith Lords* the chronological centrepiece for a planned *KOTOR* trilogy, but as the last of the Jedi, you're joined by a leathery-faced old mentor, entrusted to relearn the way of the Force, only to eventually stumble into one of those dank caves that exist only so young Padawans may face their fears (in this one, your weapons you will need).

Moments of scene-stealing aside, there is in fact a sinister and unnerving atmosphere of distrust that runs through the game, forged in large part by a cast of new characters that are more ambiguous and complex than those of the first adventure. For all the tightly

scripted dialogue and flawless delivery, the polygon personalities of *KOTOR Episode I* were easily labelled as good or bad. In *Sith Lords*, you have characters that (aside from a tiresome off-the-shelf rogue) from the very beginning portray ambivalence, hide secrets and display flashes of emotion and humour. Ultimately, while the plot twists are more obvious as the game nears its inevitable climax, the characters do a fine job of masking what small deficiencies there are in the story itself. *Knights Of The Old Republic* has effectively grown up... Or reached adolescence, at least.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

The storyline continues rather obviously on from events of the original game, which saw Jedi



Astromech droids love to explore hulls of damaged spacecraft.



HK droids – you gotta love 'em.



Korriban is not a happy place.



Races include Twi'leks, Ithorians, Hutts and Wookiees.

fight Jedi in a bloody battle to near extinction. As the game begins the Jedi Council is no more, the Old Republic is close to collapse and the Sith, though weakened after the Mandalorian Wars, are keen to hunt down and destroy once and for all the remaining members of the Jedi Order.

Sadly, for the sake of democracy and free speech, it would appear only one remains – you – the problem being that having renounced the Force and been forced into exile, you've no idea of your sudden importance. So you awake, as

“Ambivalent characters hide secrets and display flashes of emotion and humour”

you did in game one, in a strange place with only your underpants to defend you and an uncanny sense that your place in the unfolding story is rather pivotal.

If you've completed the original game, it can take some time to tie up your experiences there, with how things have actually turned out, now that a definitive reality has been set –

arguably making it more advantageous not to have played the first *KOTOR* at all. For those that have, developer Obsidian has been modestly successful in circumventing prime fiction abuse by offering dialogue choices that will hopefully recall how you played the first game.

Despite this there are one or two responses that appear

DIY LIGHTSABER

IF YOU BUILD IT, IT WILL HUM

No matter how many side-quests you embark on and in what order to tackle the planets, it will take quite some time until you get to build your first lightsaber. On my first run-through, it wasn't until 26 hours in that my glow-stick fizzed into existence. The wait however is worth it, because unlike the first game which allowed you only two upgrade slots for inserting crystals, now you add up to five enhancements; two crystals, an emitter, a lens and an energy cell. By the end of the game you should have the deadliest fluorescent blade in the universe.



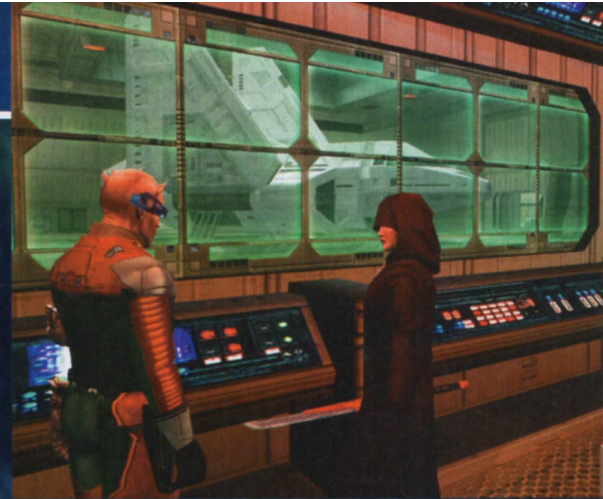
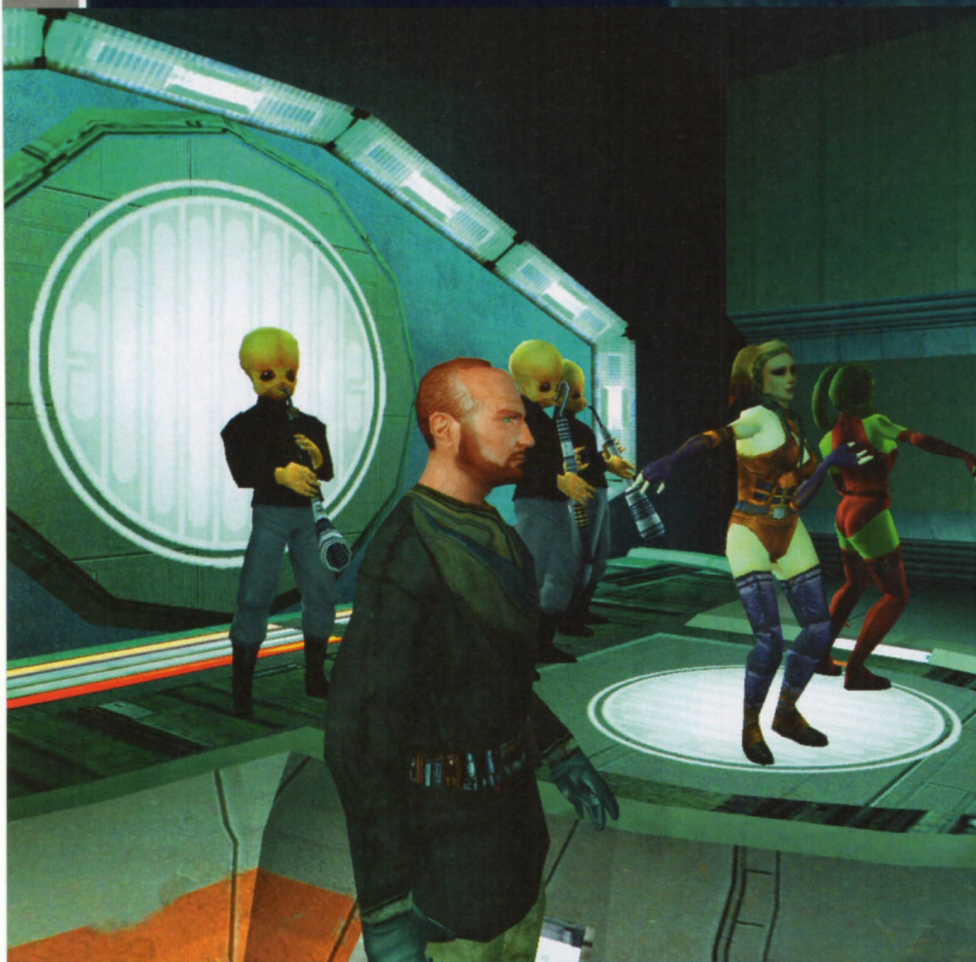
Ah, the clash of sabers. A wondrous sight.

wildly and temporarily out of character, and whilst these could be explained away as personality flaws – fleeting moments of subconscious blather on the part of the speaker – in terms of story it does highlight occurrences where continuity is partially lost. Although to be fair, only the harshest critic would let these instances hinder their enjoyment of the game.

WHEN CLONES ATTACK

As much as *Sith Lords* can be compared to *Empire Strikes Back*, the game also has an *Attack Of The Clones* feel about it, in the sense that in terms of structure and pace *KOTOR II*

feels identical to *KOTOR*. It's almost as if the inhabitants, furniture and decor have changed but the house remains the same. So for example, instead of beginning at The Endor Spire (the doomed staging post of the first game), you start on Peragus, a seemingly deserted mining outpost equally bound for extinction. From there it's on to the planet Telos where criminal gangs bicker, the authorities fight to assert control and legitimate businesses crave your protection – much as they did on Taris in the original game. It will seem for a while as if you're filling in time until the adventure



"Do you know any Will Young?"



"...Thought not."

starts proper, and you may well wonder when you might at last get your hands on a lightsaber.

Long before you are finally reunited with the glowing sword thingy, let me assure you that you will be gripped – for me, this was just as the game opened up to allow access to a number of planets. In fact, whilst I was mentally drumming my fingers fearing I was merely interested

"Long before you're reunited with your saber, let me assure you that you'll be gripped"

in the proceedings rather than absorbed, I realised that as new characters were introduced, I was beginning to question their motives more than my apparent lack of them. In one session later on, I actually spent almost two hours talking to my party members aboard the Ebon Hawke, when I really should have been out exploring.

A CHANGE IN THE FORCE

Your choices as to whether you follow the Dark or Light side of the Force cleverly has some influence on those around you, so by befriendiing one person in your group, you risk alienating someone else who may deem



The new Damien Hirst show fails to interest the pensioners.

them a threat. This was a feature of the first game, but here you can turn even the most peaceable follower of the Light into a bitter and twisted receptacle of evil. Kind of.

Choices of allegiance and game structure aside, much of what characterised *KOTOR* as a classic game remains in the sequel. The combat system is noticeably unchanged, save for the ability to switch weapons without entering the inventory screen, again offering purists turn-based depth married with all the spectacular action of real-time. This time there are more Force Powers, weapons and items to play with

too – a wrist-mounted launcher being a favourite new addition to the arsenal.

KOTOR's combat remains enormous fun because of these embellishments, but some account of terrain and personal stance might have been welcome if only to add a tactical layer to the combat, although whether such additions would have over-complicated the game is another matter. Similarly, in spite of an interface that has been marginally enhanced, it is still a minor annoyance to have to shuffle armour and weapons between your characters during tricky encounters, when some configurable preset options would have been welcome.

Graphical improvements are less obvious. The size of the game world is certainly larger

COMBAT MODE ENGAGED.



"Don't just stand there..."



Atrix should clear that up.



Adhesive grenades: for sticky situations.



Something smells a bit gassy.

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU

Now I'm no game designer, so feel free to berate my ignorance of the logistical headache such an endeavour may have created, but why can't you import characters (or, at least characters' decisions) from the first game to the second? It was a feature common to the 'Gold Box' RPGs of the late 1980s that you could transfer party members from game to game, so why not here too? It would have alleviated the plot conflicts that Obsidian has tried so hard to minimise, if nothing else.



"Down boy!"

than it was in the previous adventure, but each self-contained area is claustrophobic when compared to those you might expect in most modern PC games. Large open areas are few, and you can't wander too far from the main plot before you're dragged back in. This is not a criticism of the game so much, more of the prevailing constraints imposed on its Xbox-centric design. At least you can take consolation from the fact that whilst Xbox owners have to contend with crippling loading times and frame-rate drops, the PC version runs like a dream with higher resolution textures filling the screen – even if the character animations outside of combat are basic.

TIME FOR A CHANGE

There are lesser issues to contend with, such as characters who are extraneous

to the main plot being consistently samey throughout the game. The general population all carry the same heads on their shoulders, speak with the same voice and utter the exact same lines, depending on what planet you happen to be on. Some of your crew also tend to repeat their lines, certainly when in battle or operating machinery, and this aspect takes away a fraction from the otherwise impressive dialogue and script.

Yet despite its similarity to the first game, *Sith Lords* remains a resounding success. In terms of character, dialogue and size it offers a host of small improvements, although in terms of plot it's perhaps not quite as strong, taking a few hours to fully immerse you and providing a less subtle climax.

I suppose the greatest crime is that Obsidian has structured

the game too closely on the foundations of BioWare's first *KOTOR*, almost to the point where at times you'd be forgiven for thinking you were playing exactly the same game. In a sense however, why wouldn't you want to? *KOTOR* was a superb example of modern computer role-playing and remains one of the very best *Star Wars* game ever conceived – and *Sith Lords* is a continuation of that tradition. It's not quite up to the standard of *Empire Strikes Back* perhaps, but it's still certainly the second best middle act to grace any *Star Wars* trilogy. Let's just hope that the next episode can at least equal *The Return Of The Jedi*... [C]

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Wonderful script
- ✓ Characters with depth
- ✓ A big game, worth playing through at least twice
- ✗ Structurally too similar to the first game
- ✗ Limited by its Xbox roots

88

A worthy sequel to a classic game

CONSTANTINE

■ £29.99 | Pub: SCi | Dev: Bits Studios | ETA: March | www.bitsstudios.com

REQUIRES P4 1.5GHz, 128MB and a 64MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 2.8GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Jamie Sefton now knows exactly what hell feels like...

EVERYONE HAS

their own vision of what hell actually is. Maybe a lake of lava, with dozens of small demons with the face of Anne Widdecombe jabbing you with sharpened lolly sticks. Or perhaps just a small suburban living room, where you're forced to watch your entire life replayed second-by-second in front of your entire family and friends. For John Constantine, cigarette-puffing, terminal lung cancer celebrity of the cult comic *Hellblazer*, the fiery plane is a path to redemption, a chance to correct mistakes of the past.

BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW

Portrayed in the forthcoming big-budget Hollywood movie by Keanu Reeves, the character of Constantine has been sent back to earth after a triumvirate of devils disagreed about the ownership of his soul. Currently barred from heaven, hell is wanting to reclaim Constantine, who is attempting to get in god's good book(s) by vanquishing any son of Satan that gets in the way of his Holy Shotgun.

Constantine is a third-person action-adventure that follows the plot of the demon-possession

and nifty camera effect-stuffed film – nicknamed *The Matrix-orcist* by certain wags. Somehow, it's found its way on to the PC, despite looking, sounding, playing, behaving and smelling of a console game. Although there are some neat gameplay touches choking beneath the sulphuric fumes, this is mostly ultra-linear, film-licensed fare.

The main gimmick in *Constantine* is that the action regularly switches between Earth and hell, with the trenchcoat-wearing occultist able to pass

However, Satan's spawn also appears on earth in a variety of ghoulish guises, including scaly Scavenger Soldier grunt, the fire-breathing Kan-Gore devil dragon, and the spider-like scuttling Bile-Riz, that can possess and re-animate corpses. The monsters are actually quite well done in most cases, with the Vermin Demon – a wriggling mass of rats, spiders, moths and snakes – being a disturbing highlight.

Fortunately, *Constantine* has a heavenly armory of weapons

"This looks, sounds, plays and smells like a console game"

between the different realms by reciting magical incantations when, ahem, he's standing in a puddle of water. Copying the convention in the *Soul Reaver* games, the devilish locations are twisted versions of the Earth ones, so the relatively normal appearance of a library is transformed into a gutted building with tortured souls nailed to walls, apocalyptic red skies, fiery blasts of sulphuric winds and various nasty creatures who're obviously not looking to borrow the latest John Grisham.

to send the unholy horrors back to hell, many of them ripped straight from the pages of Alan Moore's comic. Particular favourites are the Crucifier nail-gun, the Purger crossbow and the Dragon's Breath flame-thrower. Each of these is best used in conjunction with physical punches and kicks, secondary weapons like the Holy Water Bombs and Constantine's magic spells (see 'Nasty Spells' right).

Such a shame. The building blocks of a half-decent game are here, it's just that the execution



Never wear metal gloves in a thunder storm.



INPERSPECTIVE

LEGACY OF KAIN:

DEFIANCE

Reviewed Issue 139, 79%

Crystal Dynamics' devilish action-adventure is a little old now, but it has spectral plane-shifting, telekinetic powers and is more fun to play.

MAX PAYNE 2:

THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

Reviewed Issue 136, 93%

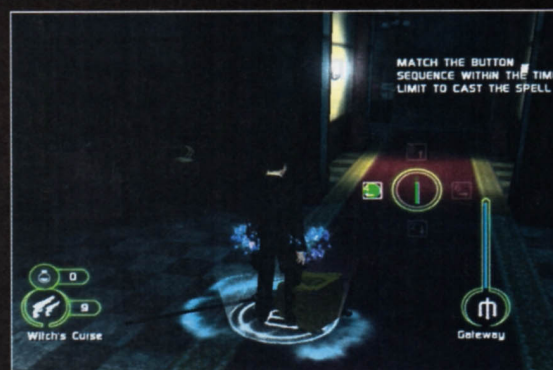
This is how to do a bullet-time third-person shooter with a great story, style, atmosphere and buckets of cool. Superb.



"It was definitely him, officer."



NASTY SPELLS



DAVID COPPERFIELD HAS NOTHING ON JOHN CONSTANTINE'S MAGIC POWERS

If *Constantine* has one thing that's quite enjoyable to execute, it's the magic incantations. You have magical energy that you can use to cast spells using the W, A, S and D keys in the correct order – kind of like a dumbed-down, satanic version of PaRappa the Rapper or other rhythm action titles. You collect more spells as you progress, and these include: Storm Crow, which directs lightning at enemies; Exorcism, that expels demons possessing human bodies; and Hunger, which summons worms that eat out devilish foes from within. Dessert anyone?



Smoking is bad for you – Constantine's had lung cancer twice...

of them is so mediocre: shoot some monsters, solve a rudimentary puzzle, watch a cut-scene, shoot some more monsters, go into hell, shoot even more monsters, get an artefact, watch another cut-scene, fight the end-of-level boss. *Constantine* gets samey very quickly, and that's despite unlocking more spells and weapons as you progress.

Everything seems to have been crow-barred in just for the sake of it from other games, such as Constantine's 'True Sight' ability to see in the dark (*Chronicles Of Riddick*) and the 180-degree slo-mo bullet-time move (*Max Payne*) that enables you to turn quickly – useless until you encounter the Impaler, who has a very handy weak spot on his back.

WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO?

However, the unforgivable crime is that aiming and looking around with the mouse is awkward, making Constantine appear as if the years of fighting demons has given him some kind of twitchy

nervous disorder. You can alter the sensitivity of the mouse, but this only makes things worse, making frenetic melee confrontations downright unenjoyable and frustrating – you have to keep the console staple of auto-aim switched on just to make it playable. An incomprehensible plot concerning a half-breed angel and strange secondary characters don't help matters either, although at least Constantine has Keanu's likeness, with his trademark monosyllabic Californian drawl imitated with some success.

SHOCKED

Constantine is sub-*Max Payne* – there's nothing surprising or challenging here that you haven't seen in a thousand other film-to-game conversions over the past five years. Level design is depressingly lacklustre, and the puzzles – some of which require you to nip back and forth between Earth and hell – are of the 'move box, climb up ledge'

and 'turn valve, switch off steam jets' variety. There isn't even a jump button – you run towards gaps and automatically leap – along with bad examples of clipping and characters walking straight through solid objects.

It's a pity, because there's a sprinkling of good ideas here: a *Se7en*-ish atmosphere; spooky phenomena such as car alarms set off as Constantine passes by; scripted sequences with guards being dragged through doors by unseen demons; an evil book in hell's library referred to as 'a real page-burner'. However, you're left with the distinct impression it's been thrown together quickly to cash-in on the forthcoming film.

Constantine is a tragic waste of a good comic license – you're much better off replaying *Max Payne 2*. Oh, and I've just thought of my own vision of videogame hell – spending an eternity in front of a state-of-the-art PC, with only a stream of film-licensed third-person action-adventures to play. Shudder. **PC**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Hell sequences are good
- ✓ Decent spell effects and weapons
- ✓ Interesting lead character
- ✗ Awkward control system
- ✗ Unimaginative linear level design
- ✗ It's soooooo a console game

59

Max Pain



Now that's one hot curry.

THE SIMS 2: UNIVERSITY

■ £19.99 | Pub: EA | Dev: Maxis | ETA: March 11 | www.thesims2.com

REQUIRES PIII 800, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D graphics card DESIRES P4 1.2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Steve Hill studies the first of the inevitable expansions packs



Good to see that LSD is still the drug of choice.

IT WAS hardly the world's biggest gamble to suggest that EA would soon be churning out *Sims 2* add-on packs, and the only real surprise is that it has taken this long. Given the *Sims*' new-found aging ability, the subject matter is appropriate enough, and the *University* expansion sees 'young adults' attempting to acquire an education in the face of the inevitable distractions. At an English university this would involve a heady combination of grinding poverty, petty crime, random sexual encounters and narcotic excesses resulting in borderline psychosis. Cunningly manage to cheat in your finals, and you could even walk away with a degree (albeit of little use).

Given that *The Sims 2: University* is based on an American campus, our corn-fed students live in luxury houses replete with widescreen TVs, pumping hi-fis, games consoles,



If you can't be arsed to clean the shitter, simply hire a maid.



The Toga Party didn't quite match the last days of Rome.

pinball tables and even Jacuzzis. Having more in common with *MTV Cribs* than the squalid rat-infested hovels, coat-hanger aerals and *Sensible Soccer*

tournaments of our squandered education, it also looks considerably more fun. So whether it's orchestrating the Frat Boy toga parties, or



The occasional streak enlivens proceedings.



The Haki Sack contest served as a nice ice-breaker.

attempting to maintain peace between Heather, Tiffany and Brittany, it provides an insight into a world we will never know. Naturally, the saccharine *Sims* approach is still in

place, and what you effectively get is a sanitised version of the John Belushi film, *Animal House*.

SPIT ROAST

A number of gameplay advances have been made, however, with the introduction of proper NPCs who can be influenced by any of your core group of Sims. For instance, you can kick back with a beer while you get some loser to do your course work. This of course gives you more time to invite the local girls' dorm over for a spit roast, or simply a straightforward barbecue.

At some stage, your charges will have to buckle down and get some work done, but encouragingly, success isn't limited to boffins and eggheads. More sociable Sims may be able to influence tutors, and the more dishonest can simply cheat. With 11 majors to choose from, the

ultimate goal is to graduate and follow one of four career paths, inevitably resulting in a well-paid, soul-destroying job, some casually held right-wing views and a new car every two years.

Before the dream dies though, there are plenty of hi-jinks to be had at *Sims University*, incorporating the trademark surrealist humour associated with the series. It's not a quantum leap from the source material, but the subtle gameplay advances and new environments will give fans a new lease of life. Ultimately though, watching a bunch of spoilt brats enjoying themselves often feels more like retribution than entertainment. **PCZ**

IMPERSPECTIVE

THE SIMS 2

Reviewed Issue 147, Score 82%
All the core gameplay, with the advantage of having no students.

PLAYBOY: THE MANSION

Reviewed Issue 153, Score 66%
Why are you even bothering to try and get into some student's pants? Just shag Playmates.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Some gameplay enhancements
- ✓ Mildly addictive
- ✗ Often too complex
- ✗ Bleedin' students

57

Sim as it ever was

LEGACY

DARK SHADOWS

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LONGEST JOURNEY" - JA forum

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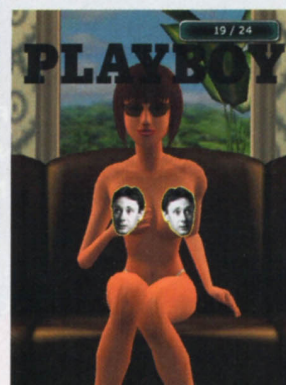
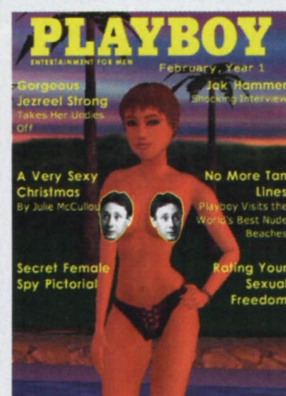
amazon.co.uk
and you're done.

WWW.GMXMEDIA.NET/LEGACY





They've made a happy man very old.



PLAYBOY: THE MANSION

■ £29.99 | Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Cyberlore | ETA: Out Now | www.playhef.com

REQUIRES PIII 800MHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card DESIRES P4 1.4GHZ, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Steve Hill tries the latest in one-handed gaming

AH, THE Playboy Mansion, scene of arguably *PC ZONE*'s finest moment. 'Twas May of last year, a Californian evening, as three smartly-dressed English gents descended upon Mr Hefner's palatial residence, sipped his vintage champagne, charmed his naked serving wenches and pissed all over his lawn like the dogs we are.

INPERSPECTIVE

SINGLES:

FLIRT UP YOUR LIFE

Reviewed Issue 142, Score 48%
A less celebrity-driven shag 'em up, albeit considerably more explicit. Proper rutting is reward for a largely tedious experience.

THE SIMS 2

Reviewed Issue 147, Score 82%
The latest version of the game that's ultimately to blame for all this stuff. If you like this sort of thing, this is as good as it gets. No shagging, mind.

Happy days indeed, but ultimately it all boils down to this, a two-bit *Sims* rip off with animated tits. Hef's generosity (or rather Ubisoft's) may have made for a memorable evening, but will it make us look upon *Playboy: The Mansion* any kinder? Will it b****cks. If anything, our first-hand experience of the gaff gives us ammunition to point out how unrealistic the game is. Or at least it would if we'd managed to sneak into the house.

SHAKE IT, BABY

In fairness, being crammed into the garden while watching German games journalists frolicking in the pool is probably not the authentic *Playboy* experience, and the game seeks to cover the more intimate side of Hugh Hefner's empire, incorporating his business both in and out of the sack. Stepping into the velvet slippers of the

incorrigible lothario, the idea is to build up the *Playboy* empire and establish the magazine as the icon it is today. So, some stuff about cars, an interview with Ted Danson and 'tasteful' pictures of girls displaying their breasts and pubic hair.

WORDS AND PICTURES

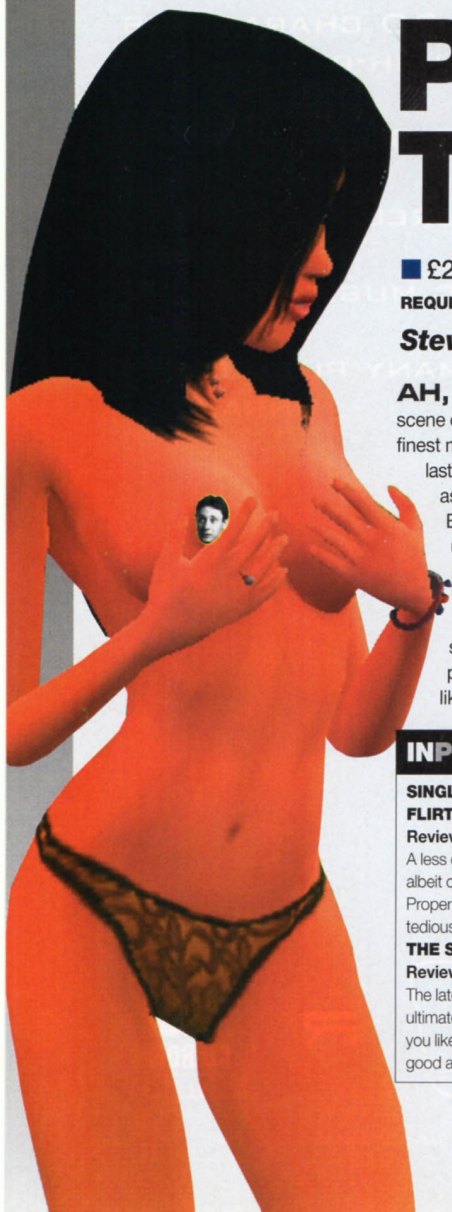
Whether playing the freeform mode or the mission-based game, the concept is the same: indulge in a near constant orgy of guiltless rutting while producing one of the world's most successful magazines. Getting the mag on the shelf involves commissioning articles and interviews for people to pretend to read while knocking one out over the pictures. The

"I'm not done yet love..."

photo-shoots are of course key, and indeed enable you to take a hands-on approach, selecting location and costumes, and even pressing the shutter yourself. Once you've run through a roll of film, you get to select your particular favourites for both centrefold and cover star, be it a skinny runway model gazing coquettishly into the lens, or a buxom old lass cupping her oomlaaters. You are Hugh Hefner, and you have the power.

Before you can secure interviews and snaps, you must hire a journalist and photographer, but more interestingly, you have to indulge in a fair amount of schmoozing. This is of course where the legendary parties come in, with Hugh inviting a

"Who's bothered about soft furnishings when you've got a mansion full of muff to see to?"





Those shorts must be chafing.

Naturally, one of the world's greatest shaggers isn't going to settle for a mere chat, and the velvet gown gets on the receiving end of the occasional splash of DNA. The sex scenes, as they're described, essentially involve Hef stripping down to his crackers while the Doris of the moment whips her top off and rides him like a Grand National winner. Underwear remains intact at all time, and in real terms it's no more than a bit of frottage. Close but no cigar. And if you're horrified at the thought of a nearly 80-year-old man grappling with some poor girl a quarter of his age, *Playboy: The Mansion* features a pre-Viagra Hef

selection of whacked-out crack whores and minor celebrities to his mansion in the hope of convincing them to appear on the pages of his magazine. Relationships have to be built through the fairly rudimentary medium of conversation, and it's a fairly straightforward business.

DIRTY DENNING

NATALIE KEEPS THE BRITISH END UP

One of the real life 'celebrities' allegedly appearing in *Playboy: The Mansion* is UK glamour model Natalie Denning. We've yet to see her in the game, although we did come across her in the flesh, recently joining her in bed for a cosy chat. According to our Nat: "They had all my measurements, so apparently it's very lifelike and accurate." As for rutting on the sofa, she says: "All good fun isn't it? It's only topless so it's not too bad." As the only British girl in the game, she claims: "I think we're a bit classier, aren't we? Bring a bit of class to *Playboy*." Yes, dear...



"Easy tiger, you'll do me back in."

as opposed to a pensioner currently spunking his last (giving the lie to the theory that you only get a bucket and a half).

DIVE IN

In a nod to *The Sims*, there's the obligatory home decoration to attend to, but who's bothered about soft furnishings when you've got a mansion full of muff? The bulk of the game involves beast on women, pressing the flesh of celebrities and getting the mag on the shelf so you can pay for the next party. And while it's tempting to stick your dick in (or against) everything that moves, you do have to keep one eye on the business.

Spend too much time toiling over hot snatch as opposed to the hot presses, and you'll have to flog one of your old masters.

If you're seeking executive relief you might be better off seeking out the Net, but

Playboy: The Mansion does fill a minor niche. It may not be the most sophisticated of games, but it is easy to spend a few hours in Hef's world, mainly to see what kind of lowlife drifts into the mansion and what you can squeeze out of them (or into them). The game can never come close to an evening at the mansion, but it's the probably the nearest you'll ever get. **CZ**



Unlock real women. Steady.



Get creative at photo-shoots.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Easy to play
- ✓ Half decent music
- ✓ Authentic breast movement
- ✓ Unlockable archive photos and interviews
- ✗ Tits not real
- ✗ Buggy
- ✗ Had one, you've had 'em all

62

Hugh's sorry now



GTR

Formation laps: about the only time you see the whole pack together.

£34.99 | Pub: Atari | Dev: SimBin | ETA: Out Now | www.gtr-game.com

REQUIRES 1.2GHz, 384MB RAM and a 32MB DirectX 8.1-compatible 3D card **DESIRES** 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB DirectX 9.0c-compatible 3D card

Suzy Wallace buckles her harness and attempts to reach the pedals of SimBin's hot rod

CARS: TO THE

uninitiated they're just an expensive metal box on wheels that allows you to get from A to B. But not to me – I know better. I know that lurking underneath the bonnets of a selection of four-wheelers is an adrenaline rush potential that would make bungee jumping seem like a pastime for OAPs – and it's

exactly this type of vehicle that features in *GTR*. So, if like me the blood that flows through your veins has an octane value, it's time to get very excited. After all, the Germans, Austrians, Swiss and Scandinavians have been burning rubber since November 2004, and now SimBin has found a UK publisher, its

decided to unleash the full horsepower of *GTR* onto us Brits.

UNDER THE BONNET

Make no mistake though, this is a driving sim rather than an arcade-style racer: you won't find any chasing police cars, extravagant nitrous effects, crafty short-cuts and other such gimmicks here. The bottom line

is, if it isn't on a real racing track, you can bet your left testicle it won't be here.

SimBin's efforts have faithfully recreated last season's FIA GT series in the game, from the names and liveries of the teams to the exact weather endured by the drivers. In terms of statistics, *GTR* offers over 70 choices of car from 18 different

models, ten different tracks that have been accurately reproduced from a combination of GPS readings, CAD and telemetry, three different difficulty settings and a comprehensive Arcade mode.

What's more, the extra time spent tinkering under the bonnet of the UK release means you can enjoy five more car models than our continental chums, the Spa 24-hour race and a new save function which enables you to record your progress mid-race.

TEST DRIVE

But figures are all well and good – what you really want to know is how the driving model stands up, right? Back when we took preview code out for a test drive a few issues back, we were more than impressed with the handling of the cars. Since then things have only got better, and the tweaks that SimBin has made now puts *GTR* in the category of 'über-realistic driving sim'.

Since I first got my hands on the finished *GTR*, a good

INPERSPECTIVE

TOCA RACE DRIVER 2

Reviewed Issue 142, Score 89% Codemasters' multi-faceted racer provides an excellent chance to experience a variety of motorsports using story-based gameplay.

NEED FOR SPEED:

UNDERGROUND 2

Reviewed Issue 150, Score 84% EA's hip and trendy street racer has provided frantic fun for *Max Power* lovers the world over, but doesn't quite cut it in the realism stakes.



GTR offers a plethora of camera angles.



HAVING A FIDDLE

WHAT'S A SLOW BUMP WHEN IT'S AT HOME?



Automobile affection as the Lambo gets frisky with the Viper.

Despite being an avid car enthusiast for more than a decade, I'm still constantly bewildered by some of the set-up options in driving games – and *GTR* is certainly no exception. Coast, slow bump and packers? They could be sexual techniques for all I know.

However, SimBin has done the less mechanically-minded of us a massive favour with the inclusion of the Engineers Manual, which provides a layman's explanation of the terms normally only understood by grease monkey mechanics. Not only that, but after you've finally got to grip with what these tweakable settings achieve, the manual features a fantastic section entitled 'The Experts Speak'. In it, FIA GT drivers Henrik Roos and Christophe Bouchut join the SimBin development team to discuss some handling problems you may encounter and how to resolve them using the settings. Now there's no excuse to avoid getting under the bonnet and tinkering with your motor on a Sunday...

percentage of my lunch hours have been spent firmly grasping my Logitech/Momo steering wheel. In fact, I've been using it so much, it's taken up permanent residence on my desk. The first time you switch the game on, hear the car start up and feel the vibration travel from the steering wheel along your arms, you can tell that SimBin has created something special. This is without a doubt the closest you may ever come to driving a real-life supercar – and that's not bad going for a few tenners is it?

ALL GOOD?

Now, I know you may be thinking that ten tracks doesn't sound like much to keep you going, but as a driving fan, I can guarantee there's plenty here to keep you

"This is without a doubt the closest you may ever come to driving a real-life supercar"

revved up for weeks. The best part of *GTR* isn't even trouncing your opponents, who possess unnervingly human-like AI during races, apparently modelled on individual drivers' personalities.

No, for me the most addictive element is perfecting each and every corner: hitting the apex at the perfect point, judging your cornering speed correctly and figuring out the correct time to start feeding the power back in. The perfect lap is elusive, yet still obtainable with the right amount of practice – and even when you manage that, you'll still be coming back to improve on your track times and win that championship.

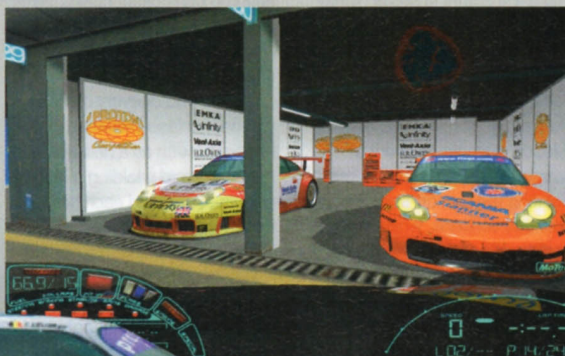
Don't think that *GTR*'s only for the hardcore few either; the different difficulties make it accessible for driving fans of all skill levels. Arcade mode, for instance, is ideal for an easy drive – and with a bit of practice can turn any driver into a speed junkie. Meanwhile, if you're more skilled, the Semi-Pro and

corners in *TOCA* springs to mind), so constant practice is the only way to turn you from a Driving Miss Daisy into a driving demon.

ALL GOOD?

So, with everything firing on all cylinders, including the rather excellent shiny graphics engine, are there any dodgy rust patches in the game you should know about?

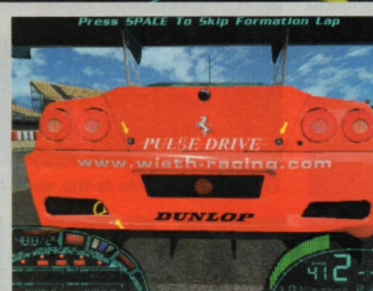
First, we're not impressed with the headlight strength in the night-time Spa track, and there are no new gameplay ideas (although that's not what *GTR*'s about). Our major gripe though is that championships can only be undertaken in Semi-Pro or Simulation flavour, meaning if you're a beginner, there's a way to go before you can compete with a hope of winning.



Pretty Porsches park their ample butts in the pits.



Head-on: you might need new pants after experiencing this view.



The closest you'll ever get to a Ferrari?

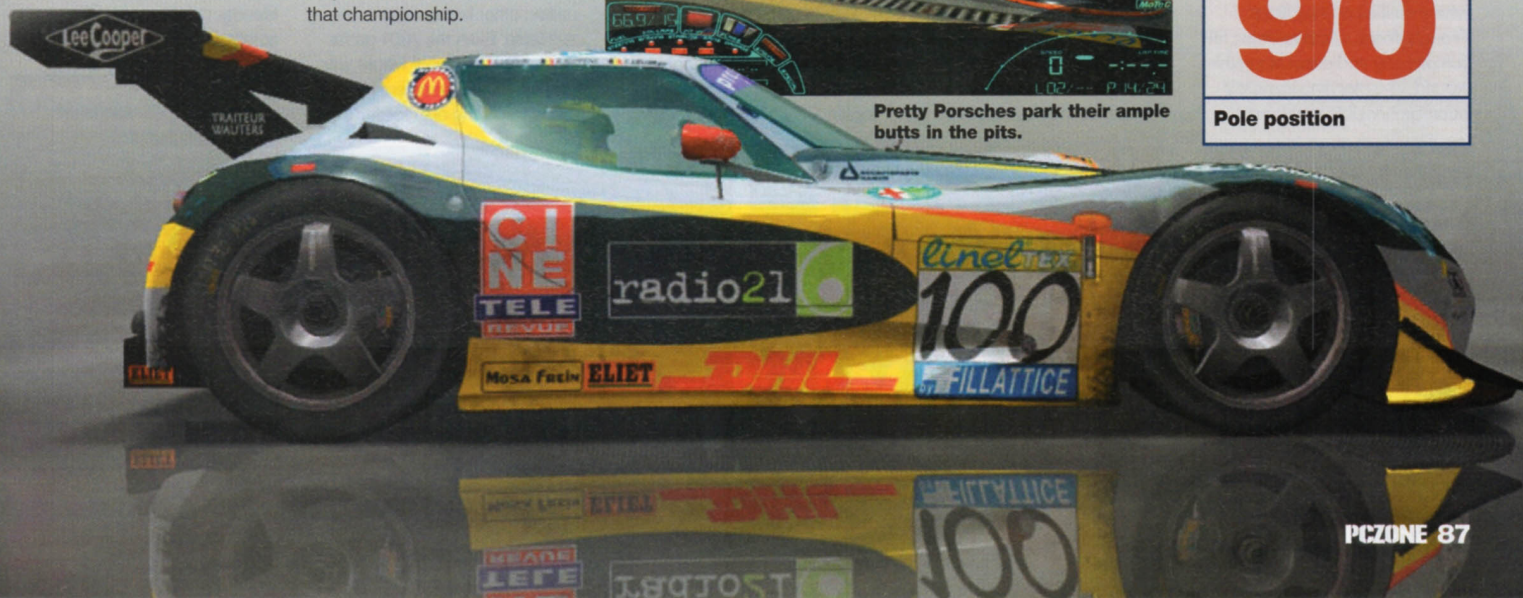
However, bemoaning these slight niggles is like complaining that your new Ferrari doesn't have a cup holder. Given SimBin's humble background (the team began creating mods for EA's *F1 2002*), and considering this is its first game, the collective has achieved the impressive feat of producing the most realistic driving simulation that we've ever burnt rubber in. *Grand Prix 4* used to hold that title, but now there's a sleek, more talented newcomer taking the chequered flag. **W**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Gorgeous graphics
- ✓ Uber-realistic driving model
- ✓ Awesome sound effects
- ✓ Difficulty levels accessible to all
- ✗ Championships not available on all difficulties
- ✗ Will only appeal to driving fans

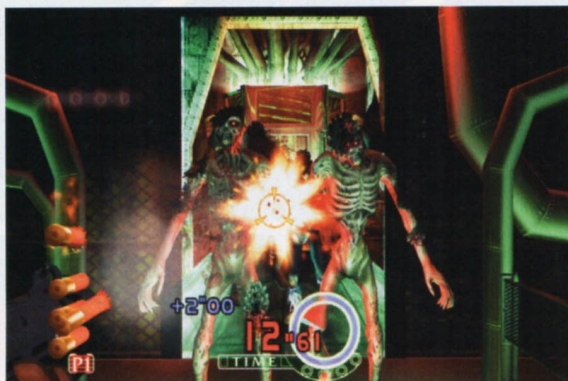
90

Pole position





We reckon he's the bad cop.



Time Attack mode is the most frantic.



Bros have really let themselves go.



THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD III

£20 | Pub: Sega | Dev: Sega | ETA: Out Now | www.sega-europe.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D graphics card DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D graphics card

Jamie Sefton can see dead people. Better get the pump-action shotgun...

"I DON'T wanna die!" God, I used to love *The House Of The Dead* – and *Virtua Cop* too, while we're talking coin-op light-gun games. Sega has now finally pulled the zombie finger out of its backside (nice image) and released the latest in the franchise, *The House Of The Dead III*, on PC. The game is two years late, mind, but at least you can still blast the on-screen zombies with a replica weapon.

The House Of The Dead III follows the template of the two earlier games, presenting a basic on-rails shooter where you (and a friend in the co-op mode – though not available in this PC version either) shoot the various rotting nasties as they burst through doors, climb ceilings, fall from the sky and crawl along the ground. The storyline is mostly incomprehensible, but is set 20

years after the last game, and follows the adventures of a male and female agent trying to find out why there are so many genetically enhanced zombies about the place. Or something. In any case, you won't care because the voice-acting is terrible – it even manages to make the actors in *Blade: Trinity* look like Oscar contenders.

ONE-GUN SALUTE

Your only weapon is a hefty shotgun, which automatically reloads when you run out of ammo – you don't have to keep pointing the gun off-screen as in previous versions, which makes both the Survival mode (arcade-style branching storyline) and Time Attack mode (shoot enemies against the clock) much easier to complete.

Now, all you have to do is

follow the on-rails action, aim the cross-hair with a mouse or light-gun and blast any slaving zombies before they get too close, damage your character and lose you a life. Along the way you occasionally have to save your partner by shooting the undead surrounding them, and you can collect bonus items such as coins and bonus lives by blasting barrels, boxes and other destructible items.

At the end of every chapter you have a face-off with a classic big boss, such as a hellish security guard wielding a club of human skulls, and each has a weak spot that you have to continuously riddle with bullets to bring them down. Sophisticated it isn't. In fact, *The House Of The Dead III* is so devastatingly brainless, that any zombies looking for food would starve.

Definitely the best element of the game is the trigger-happy, ultra-violent killings – heads explode, limbs detach from fleshy bodies, and the blood splatters freely around the environments. There's an excellent array of creatures ranging from bulky, lurching corpses, to fast-moving axe-wielding cadaverous nutters, and they all split apart in a very satisfactory (and extremely gory) fashion.

SIMPLY NOT THE BEST

But, even with a light-gun, this is a hideously dated shooter that's difficult to recommend when you have *Doom 3*, *Painkiller* and a million other better titles available. Even the 2001 game *Typing Of The Dead*, where you have to kill the monsters by quickly spelling out words, is

infinitely more engaging – and improves your keyboard skills. At least *The House of the Dead III* gives you an opportunity to dig that dust-covered light-gun out of the loft for one last dalliance with those not-so-friendly, neighbourhood zombies. **HOTD RIP. [C]**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Gratuitous violence
- ✓ Good collection of zombies
- ✓ Fun with a light-gun
- ✗ It's years old
- ✗ Extremely limited and straightforward on-rails gameplay
- ✗ Repetitive

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Dead On Arrival

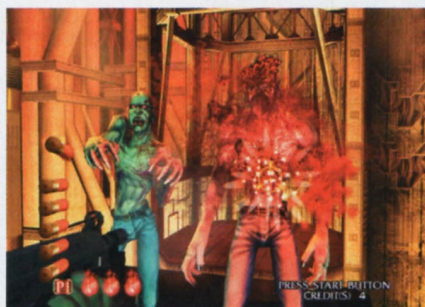
INPERSPECTIVE

DOOM 3

Reviewed Issue 146, Score 90%
We can't really recommend another on-rails shooter, because, well, who wants to play those anymore? Play id's scare-a-thon or...

HALF-LIFE 2

Reviewed Issue 148, Score 97%
...this. We reckon Valve's FPS is the best zombie-shooting game out there at the moment. Ravensholm is the new Raccoon City.



Wot no light-gun?



You've got to admire the zombies' guts.

GET REAL



Experience the original FIA GT Championship first-hand on your PC as you pit your skills against over 70 different opponents on all 10 legendary race courses such as SPA, Donington, and Monza. Developed by racing professionals, GTR is the most realistic racing experience ever!



- > Original FIA GT Series cars and courses
- > 3 playing modes for newcomers, experienced players and simulation pros including intense multiplayer action
- > Real race teams featuring over 70 different race cars, including the Porsche 911, Viper GTS-R, BMW Z3 M and Ferrari 550 Maranello
- > Highly realistic opponent AI giving a total race experience!
- > Dynamic weather and daylight changes during races
- > Based on real-life FIA GT team telemetry data
- > Live Track Technology: course conditions change as the race progresses

www.gtr-game.com

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"Where is the oracle, Mr Anderson?"



How much leg can a wood-chipper chuck?



Will Porter's first day on PC ZONE.

THE PUNISHER

■ £34.99 | Pub: THQ | Dev: Volition |
ETA: March 4 | thq.com/punisher

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card with hardware TnL
DESIRES P4 2GHz, 256MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Sick and wrong or not sick enough?
Anthony Holden is out for justice

THIS WAS going to be the one where I drew the line. As much as I love violent games, I was all ready to get on my high horse and declare this the ultimate sign of moral decay in our industry. Torture! Mutilation! Cold-blooded cruelty! All part of the race to exploit our wayward youth and capture a bit of free publicity in the pages of the *Daily Mail*.

And then, a few months prior to release, THQ went and toned it all down. *The Soldier Of Fortune*-style dismemberment was removed. The vicious

torture scenes – taking in everything from a *Fargo*-style encounter with a wood chipper to a kerbside homage to *American History X* – were burnt out, solarised into a mere suggestion of their former brutality. Marvel's misanthropic antihero, an NRA poster-boy with the most vicious sense of justice this side of an American detention camp had been tamed.

Which is great if you're concerned with the moral turpitude of the industry, but it does leave me in a bit of a quandary. You see, toning down the game's sick side has, in a sense, ruined this comic-book shooter. Without its depraved *raison d'être* the game's essential flimsiness is exposed, and the resulting action is as hollow as the tips of *The Punisher's* vengeful bullets. Ultimately, it's just another generic third-person shooter.

To state the obvious for a second, the game casts you as Frank Castle, aka the Punisher.



The Punisher in not-violent-enough shocker.

He's your classic pissed-off psychopath out for revenge on the world because his family was slain by the Mob. Basically, not a happy bunny. The plot occurs in flashback, from a prison cell, as the police reconstruct a particularly violent chapter in the Punisher's life, slashing and burning his way through a crime family in an effort to rid the world of scum.

NO PAYNE, NO GAIN

At this point you might be noticing some parallels with *Max Payne 2* (to which the game has frequently and generously been compared),



"I'm singing in the rain..."

cruelty (no longer graphic but still nasty) and an insubstantial reward system. This revolves around a 'punishment metre' that fills up according to how much pain you dish out in each level and how you go about it.

You're rewarded for saving innocents, letting a criminal go when he succumbs to interrogation and not getting shot, but also for being as sadistic as possible in your variety of killing techniques. Options include shooting

"You can knife people in the face in 'rage' mode or torture them in interrogation scenes"

consists almost entirely of unsubtle room clearing, as you cut your way through hordes of criminals on your way to uncertain revenge.

Admittedly, things are spiced up to some degree by an occasional outburst of

people, throwing them out of windows, performing quick executions, knifing them through the face in 'rage' mode or torturing them to death in the show-stopping interrogation scenes. As a concession to decency, the latter actually

INPERSPECTIVE

MANHUNT

Reviewed Issue 143, 74%

The success of *Manhunt* may have paved the way for *The Punisher* and other exploitation-style games, but at least Rockstar's offering had some style to it.

MAX PAYNE 2

Reviewed Issue 136, 93%

The king and lord of all third-person shooters; violent and explosive but never gratuitous.

SUCKER FOR PUNISHMENT

SPECIAL INTERROGATIONS STRETCH THE BOUNDS OF HUMOUR

For the more sadistic and/or juvenile gamers out there, the key selling points of *The Punisher* are its 'special' interrogations and unique kills. The latter are simply places where you can execute people in unusual ways, such as throwing them in



"Hot enough for you?"

a coffin with a hand grenade or sacrificing them on a primitive altar. These are fun in a sick sort of way, but the special interrogations take things to a whole new level. Basically, they involve using designated objects in the environment as torture devices, with a torture mini-game to determine the success or messy failure of your interview. Examples include a crematorium, an industrial drill and a toilet bowl, and you always have the option of finishing the subject off once you've extracted your information.

The problem is, the system was designed to work with the analogue stick of a PS2 controller, and doesn't work very well with a mouse. Which makes it not only morally dubious but extremely bloody frustrating too.



Dentistry on the NHS.

loses you points, though in some cases you're rewarded with a brief cut-scene, so it goes both ways.

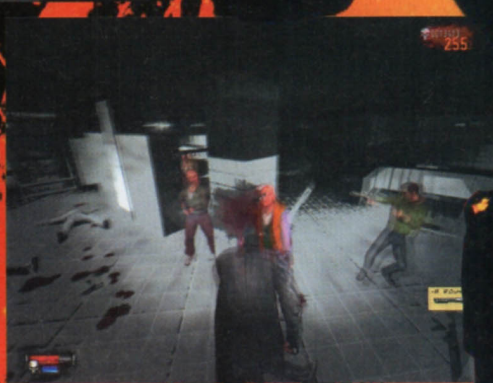
DARK JUSTICE

The idea, presumably, is to make you hew as closely as possible to the Punisher's black-and-white moral code. High scores earn you medals, extra challenges and points to upgrade your attributes, as well as providing some dubious replay value if you're the sort tempted by shiny baubles and unlockable concept art.

All this would be fine, of course, if the action wasn't so damn tedious. With so many generic, shambling enemies to dispose of, your time is mostly spent mowing people down

with a big gun rather than interrogating. This is fatally dull, proving that it doesn't matter how many fancy killing techniques you've got if you haven't got the fundamentals right. With the original, blood-splattered blueprint intact, the action may have provided some guilty but gory pleasure, but with the sadism toned down, the third-person action is largely uninteresting.

To make matters worse, the technology is primitive by modern PC standards. The environments are barely interactive, texturing is sparse and the AI at times seems non-existent. What's more, the control system hasn't been adjusted to account for the greater accuracy of mouse



Yawn. More baddies to shoot.

control, and as a result there's little challenge to speak of.

Ironically, *The Punisher* may have been a better game if it were more offensive. As it stands, the only affront is how bland and repetitive it is and how heavily it relies on violent gimmickry. It's attempted to follow in the footsteps of games like *Manhunt*, but it hasn't even managed to get the controversy right, and the result is not worth getting worked up about in any fashion. [C]

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Lots of gratuitous violence
- ✓ Faithful to the Marvel character
- ✗ Dull and repetitive shoot-outs
- ✗ Clearly designed for consoles
- ✗ Not much going on under the violence

62

Too bland to offend

PSYCHOTOXIC

■ £24.99 | Pub: Whiptail | Dev: NuclearVision | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES P3 1.3GHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

As the Fourth Horseman rides towards the final Apocalypse, Richie Shoemaker saddles up to meet him, udders fully loaded

IF there's one thing sure to promote a flicker of interest in a first-person shooter, it's the presence of a sassy firebrand heroine wearing

cheese-wire knickers and low-cut denims. Give her a unique and satisfying arsenal, notably an Udder Gun and flesh-seeking robotic pit bull mines, and the phrase 'the Germans are going to love it' immediately springs to

mind. Sadly, despite being locally brewed, the Germans weren't all that impressed. Partly because Angie Prophet has the look of a Cabbage Patch doll, but mostly because for all its B-grade, schlock pretensions, the game is an unsatisfying mess of unrealised potential from start to finish.

Take, for instance, your supernatural powers, which promise such stunts as bullet-time and telepathy. Now we love slowing down the clock and cracking people over the head with teapots, but here such abilities are treated as cheap power-ups, clearly bolted on to add a bullet-pointed feature to the back of the packaging.

The variety and weight of level design is impressive, with surreal locales far more emotive than anything *Max Payne* or *Deus Ex* could conjure up. The standard weapons (M16, MP5 and so on)



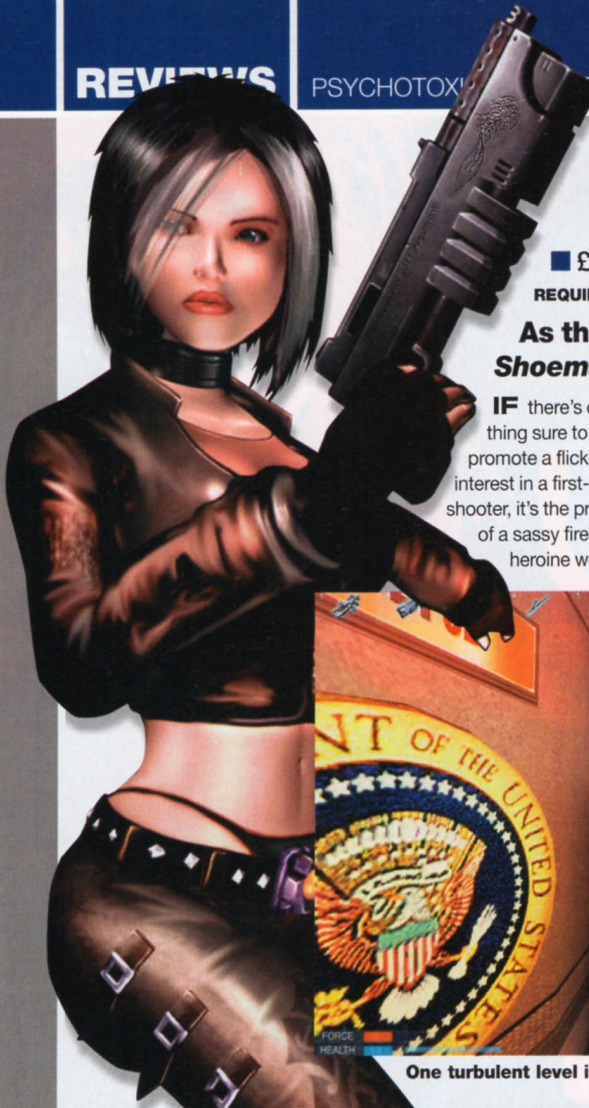
Together in electric dreams.

have a pleasing bulk to them, but for every second of satisfaction, there is a minute of monotony; where cardboard enemies fall under a cloud of red paint, physics offer no value whatsoever, AI is largely non-existent and gameplay follows the worn-ragged formula of coloured keycards and enemies that appear from thin air. And the less said about the Udder Gun the better.

PCZONE
VERDICT

35

Poisoned



One turbulent level is set on a plane, and jolts convincingly.

DISCIPLES II: GOLD EDITION

■ £14.99 | Pub: Hip Interactive | Dev: Strategy First | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PII 233MHz, 32MB RAM and an 8MB graphics card

DESIRES PIII 700MHz, 64MB RAM, a 16MB 3D graphics card and modem

Richie Shoemaker is going for gold

2002 WAS a vintage year for fantasy strategy games. *Heroes Of Might & Magic* made a return, as did *Warlords* and its usurper *Age Of Shadows*. Lesser known was the sequel to *Disciples*, a turn-based strategy affair notable for its more console-inspired strategies and storylines. Taking the standard

Tolkien-inspired setting, it sprinkled on it – although not altogether successfully – some *Final Fantasy* magic. The result was a story-driven game that whilst lacking in meaty depth, at least managed to provide a goodly amount of role-playing.

The themes were continued and the game updated through three expansion packs, none of



An RPG MILF.

which made it to these shores (hence this timely Gold Edition). The first expansion explored the dark side with a story centring on demons and the undead; the next featured the dwarven Mountain Clans and



Eight CDs for £15! Blank CDs cost more than that.

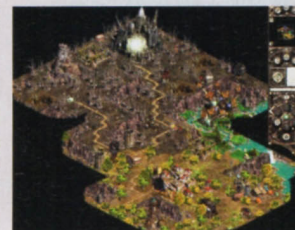
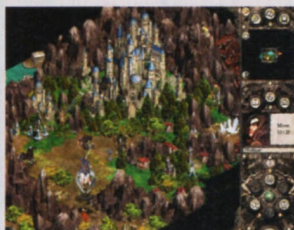
the Empire, whilst 2003's add-on enlisted the help of elves. Of course, each offering featured much the same style of gameplay, but at least the switch in perspective and focus kept things from getting too stale.

With hundreds of hours of gameplay, this certainly is a

time-consuming anthology to work through. And considering its price and the fact that fantasy games are rather thin on the ground, this collection offers obscene value for money. The downside is that graphically the game is looking more than a little dated. However, if you're a fan of the 'Gold Box' RPGs of old and don't mind it looking a little rough, this should keep you going until part three in the series surfaces later in the year.



Final Fantasy fans will enjoy the turn-based combat.



PCZONE
VERDICT

70

Hours of beardy fun

RUGBY 2005

■ £29.99 | Pub: EA | Dev: HB Studios | ETA: March 11

REQUIRES PIII 700, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card
DESIRES P4 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Anthony Holden draws the short straw and enters the scrum

WHEN IT comes to choosing between footie and rugger, it's no secret where PC ZONE's allegiances lie. However, as the Australian of PC ZONE, I do know more about rugby than the rest of the team put together. As such, it's testament to EA's mass-market know-how that beginners such as the others could actually play

Rugby 2005 and – God forbid – enjoy it. Well, at least for a moment or two anyway.

To be fair, the game does cater pretty well for rugby virgins, with comprehensive training options and a new feature called Rugby 101. The rudiments of the game – and the sport – can be picked up in no time, allowing you to launch

straight into a tournament or fixture of your choice.

As you'd expect from EA, all the major teams, players and tournaments are in place, with improved player likenesses and accurate stadia to set the scene. Other improvements include new motion capture, on-the-fly play-calling and the ability to throw fakes. Or in



A man has moved a strange ball over a line. Hoorah!

layman's terms, buggar all (which funnily enough, is the motto of our local team).

As these things go, it plays acceptably well – the only major stumbling block being that rugby is simply too technical for a videogame conversion. The gameplay is repetitive and faltering, and much of your time in defence is spent struggling to select the right player.



For all that, *Rugby 2005* is a polished and comprehensive affair that replicates the sport with some accuracy, and if that's what you're after then don't let us stop you.

PCZONE VERDICT **70**
 Competent but rugby



If this was *Pro Evo Rugby*, we might play it.



England – currently crap at rugby.

PRO RUGBY MANAGER 2

■ £34.99 | Digital Jesters | Cyanide Studios | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 500MHz, 128MB RAM and a 16MB DirectX 9-compliant 3D card
DESIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB DirectX 9-compliant 3D card

Anthony Holden tackles his hardest assignment yet

REVIEW one rugby game and all of a sudden they think you're a freaking expert. Now it's *rugby management*? How can this be happening?

Sequel to the so-called *Champ Man* of rugby, *Pro Rugby Manager 2* is essentially an expanded version of last year's effort, with updated rosters, more

teams and tournaments and a host of superficial improvements. The amateurish presentation of yesteryear is gone, replaced with a shiny new interface that improves functionality without quite

approaching the sleek utility of a *Football Manager*.

Sports management games are notoriously frustrating and imprecise buggers, and in this respect *PRM2* is more guilty than most, giving little concrete feedback and requiring considerable amounts of guesswork to progress. If anything, the game is even harder work than last time, with a dizzying array of numbers, tables and variables to administer, right down to choosing a clinic for your players' knee reconstructions.

In its favour, the interactive 3D matches are reasonably compelling, and with so many tactical options, probably more realistic than those in *Rugby 2005* (see above).



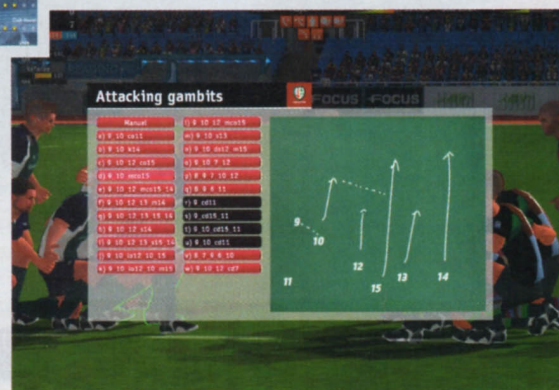
Jonny Wilkinson's had his Ready Brek.



Isometric views. Yum.

Ultimately of course, *Pro Rugby Manager 2* is strictly for hardcore rugger fans only who secretly want to be accountants. The rest of us will just have to make do with filing our tax returns and pretending to be Andy Robinson.

PCZONE VERDICT **62**
 Odd-shaped balls



What have the gambits done to deserve this?

SKI RACING 2005

■ £29.99 | Pub: JoWooD | Dev: Coldwood Interactive | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card
DESIRES P4 1.4GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB 3D card and a modem

Richie Shoemaker is on a slippery slope



Horace goes skiing.



Watch yourself again and again!

IT'S NOT often that a skiing game comes in for review and so, as a journo, I get to slide out the old clichéd lines about the graphics being 'snow good' and the skiers moving like they're 'piste'. Sadly, this isn't the case in *Ski Racing 2005* because the graphics are fairly decent: mountains look suitably mountainous, the skiers slip across snow convincingly enough and the whole thing zips along with a sense of speed you could say was fairly credible.

However, the problem with *Ski Racing* is obvious in the title: it's about racing on skis, against the clock, down a hill, so variety is not the game's strong point.

Yes, the game features such locales as Val D'Iserre and Beaver Creek (stop sniggering), as well as all the big names from the sport. But when it comes down to it, a mountain is a mountain and one white powdery incline is

much the same as any other, save for the positioning of various flags through which you must navigate.

If you own a chalet in Innsbruck cover your ears now, but dare I say that events such as Slalom, Super-G and Downhill all seem the same. What makes matters worse is that you only have to touch a flag to be disqualified, which is harsh.

Some sort of career mode would have been welcome too, as would some decent multiplayer functionality, but for a simple game where the aim is to slide down a mountain in the fastest possible time, *Ski Racing 2005* does the job. Stick in a snowboard and some Prodigy tunes and it would have been a whole lot better though.



**PCZONE
VERDICT**

Downhill

44



Get some speed up and it's fairly exhilarating.



If you look closely, you can see Skippy hiding in those trees.

TRANSPORT GIANT: DOWN UNDER

■ £19.99 | Pub: JoWooD | Dev: JoWooD | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 500MHz, 64MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card
DESIRES P4 800MHz, 128MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Richie Shoemaker goes to the land of Paul Hogan, Foster's and Dingos...

**FULL VERSION OF
TRANSPORT GIANT
REQUIRED**

DESPITE the colourful characters that inhabit the former open-air prison and the alien wildlife that exists there, very few games are ever set in the land where beer does flow and men chunder. In fact, this first add-on for what was on release a markedly average *Transport Tycoon* wannabe must surely be the first (if it isn't, don't bother writing in to complain).

Strange thing is, the idea works because the Australian transport

system – or lack of – makes for quite a challenging setting, simply because it's evolved in isolation from a world where the railroad has been dominant. We're talking 50ft 'land trains' that would put the Yorkies up any English trucker who considers his rig of impressive size. Then there are the flying doctors, inhospitable mining outposts set miles from anywhere and crocodile farms, all of which have been included.

But of course, *Down Under* is still an expansion for a game made enjoyable only through recent patches. Despite the automation of some tasks and added realism through the recent train signalling system, the interface still isn't as natural or as powerful as it could be. And the music offers the stock mix of blues and duff reggae with not a didgeridoo to be heard. After a few hours you might just as well be planning a route through Newfoundland as New South Wales.



Can you guess what it is yet?



Roadtrains take a detour past Ramsay Street.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

Diversion ahead

61



ALEXANDER

■ £29.99 | Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: GSC Game World | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES P4 1.5GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.8GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Martin Korda finds there's nothing great about this Alexander

'BASED ON Oliver Stone's Epic Film' read the words emblazoned on the box. That should help it shift some copies, because the quality of the game certainly won't.

Reeking of a rush job and criminally lacking imagination, *Alexander* looks about as appealing as something you'd

scrape off your shoe and flush down the toilet for fear of infection.

The hideously-dated engine does its best to make you believe that *Alexander* is an epic RTS, but in truth, the grainy graphics and abysmal pile-ups posing as battles are an insult to any self-respecting 3D card.

The majority of levels require you to either schlep around massive maps and skirmish with pockets of enemy resistance, or squint at your monitor like a lazy-eyed spud as hundreds of miniscule troops mill around the level unresponsively, before eventually (at the tenth time of asking) cramming into tightly knit clusters that negate any tactical or even non-tactical input from you. And don't even get me started on the voice-acting, with most of the characters sounding more like



Naval battles add a semblance of variety to the proceedings.

bemused dopes than great military leaders.

On the plus side, there are a couple of vaguely pleasant touches, such as combatants

falling over when hit and rising back up to rejoin the hostilities, along with a decent selection of units. There's also some attempt at variety thanks to a few incredibly basic naval battles.

For the most part though, *Alexander* is a mess, a hurriedly produced and lazily-designed RTS produced to cash in on gamers hoping to relive the film's stunning battles. Just make sure you're not one of them.

PCZONE VERDICT 41
Epically flawed



Larger battles should be epic, but aren't.



The voice-acting is painfully bad.



Look at the 'ickle troops. Aren't they sweet?



Tackle mythical beasts and learn how to play chess...



Woods picks up the horsey and takes the prawn.

MAJESTIC CHESS

■ £19.99 | Pub: JoWooD | Dev: Fluent Entertainment | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 500, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 800, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

Dave Woods isn't moved by the new chess challenger. In fact, he's just plain board...

"THE GREATEST game of all time just got better." Not my words, but those of Anatoly Karpov, and I'd like to know exactly how much he got paid. Because the fact is, *Majestic Chess* does nothing to improve upon a game that's acknowledged as one of the finest games of skill humanity has ever created, and one that originated sometime before the year 600AD, and possibly as far back as 100AD.

Look at the evidence. The one thing it brings to the table is

'Chess Adventure', which has you roaming around a pitifully presented map, learning the basics of the game from mythical three-headed creatures lurking in pixellated castles in Chessland. It might be one way to teach your kids the basics, but it's certainly not the best, and it certainly doesn't make chess better-er.

The actual chess engine on display in the main game is solid enough, and, as has been said before, chess is chess is, well, chess.

So what a PC game really needs to do is work on the interface (*Majestic's* is really, really poor), make it easy to get a game started with an AI opponent around your level (*Majestic* makes it nigh-on impossible), and offer seamless online play (something that *Majestic* actually gets right).

It also shouldn't cost the earth, and although *Majestic Chess* is reasonably priced, there's nothing here that would make me recommend this over any of the recent *Chessmaster* incarnations, or the recently reviewed *Fritz Chess 8*. Both of these games garnered 'Essential' awards. This just about passes muster.

PCZONE VERDICT 56
Stalemate



Flashy graphics and loadsa money? You can keep 'em – indie games is where it's at.
Anthony Holden puts one ear to the floor and beckons you to the sound of the underground...

PARADOXION

■ \$24.95 (£13.25) | Dev: VSB Games | www.vsbgames.com



It's the game your brain would want you to play.

OF ALL THE indie contenders this month, this was the last one I expected to sneak in as 'Game Of The Month'. To look at, it's just another miserable 'three of a kind' puzzler, except with an unusually drab colour palette and complete dearth of personality. A brief play only confirms this – the presentation is positively dingy and the supposedly 'soothing' music is straight from the elevators of hell.

Despite all this, *Paradoxion* is a wonderfully elegant little game. The basic object is to clear the game board of all elements – mostly orbs and gems – by placing an inventory of items in just the right places and sequence. When a group

of matching elements clears, it sets off a 'blast' effect that shifts certain neighbouring elements into new boxes, and the solutions are all based on setting up chain reactions to make everything slot together perfectly.

There's a powerful appeal here to the neat and logical parts of the brain, the parts that might otherwise be telling you to alphabetise your CD collection or watch *Countdown*. If you have a fondness for such things, you'll be hopelessly hooked.

Now, if only the Japanese would do a version with robots and monkeys and so forth, then we'd really be on to something.

PCZONE VERDICT

78



To say the asking price is ambitious would be putting it lightly.

CELLBLOCK SQUADRONS

■ \$25 (£13.25) | Dev: Super Furious Software | www.superfurious.com

SPACE GAMES are notoriously difficult to pull off. Whatever the diehard *Wing Commander* fans out there tell you, the setting just doesn't lend itself to exciting action.

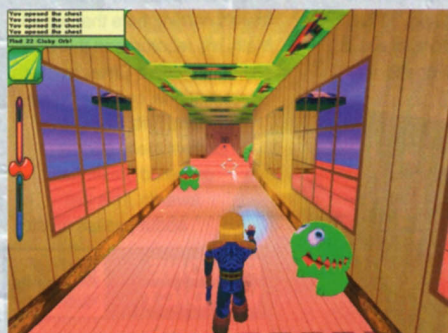
For a start, the environment is empty and featureless, with no fixed points of reference and few possibilities for decoration. Any dogfighting that takes place in such a vague 3D space is, with very few exceptions, both painstaking and spectacularly dull – sometimes with the added bonus of being completely disorienting. Recent efforts such as

Freelancer and *X2* have gone some way to overcoming these problems, but to attempt such a problematic genre on a shoestring budget is, to my mind, sheer folly.

Cellblock Squadrons is a shareware space game from Down Under, and – guess what? – it's both painstaking and very dull. The presentation is just without its merits, but the gameplay is just hopelessly simplistic compared to today's genre standards.

PCZONE VERDICT

38



You play a heroic prince called Dreamy. Really.

GLOBY

■ \$19.95 (£10.50) | Dev: Xeny | www.alawar.com/games/globy

BELIEVE it or not, 'Globy' is an actual, honest-to-god word in the English language. It means, obviously: 'resembling or pertaining to a globe.' It's one of those words that seems like it shouldn't exist – more like something uttered by a child or a semi-literate American tourist attempting to describe his wife's physique.

Coincidentally, *Globy* the game also seems like something created by infants and/or imbeciles. This 3D abortion is among the most primitive things we've ever

seen, blending blocky graphics with absurd level design and the barest wisp of action/adventure gameplay. It's kind of like what *The Legend Of Zelda* might have been if Shigeru Miyamoto had spent a decade dancing for The Happy Mondays, followed by several years of chronic glue abuse. Its only possible redeeming feature is that it taught us a new word.

PCZONE VERDICT

19

ZZED

■ \$19.95 (£10.50) | Dev: NevoSoft | www.nevosoft.com/zzed/zzed.html



Puzzle Bobble in space.



No head-to-head play, unfortunately.



Now that's a lot of bubblegum.

GENUINELY new concepts in arcade-style games are pretty rare these days, and most shareware outfits seem content to put a slightly new twist on a well-worn formula. In the case of *Zzed*, a colour-matching game from indie veterans NevoSoft, the twist is 'Puzzle Bobble in space'.

So, instead of a little dinosaur firing bubbles at other bubbles to make them pop, you're a spaceship firing meteorites at other meteorites to make them explode.

In this case however, the meteorites are floating in space, governed by shifting gravity fields and a rudimentary physics

engine, and as such you can bash them about quite a bit and force them to go where you want them to. You can also fly around the level to some extent, though this is best reserved for emergencies.

As a concept it works surprisingly well. You don't have that brilliant risk-taking

aspect of *Puzzle Bobble* where you build up a delicate chandelier of bubbles before dropping them for a huge bonus, but there is a combo system that partly compensates. All in all, not a bad turn on an old theme.

PCZONE VERDICT

65

HIGHTAILED

■ \$19.99 (£10.50) | Dev: Indiepath | www.hightailed.com

ROUND COUNT: 8

try to surround green monster in 8 rounds



What the hell is all this about?

WE'VE SEEN some bizarre things in our time, but *Hightailed* has to rank up there with the best of them. The gameplay is simple enough – you take it in turns to move creatures around a board, attempting to manoeuvre the CPU into a position where it can't make a valid move on its next turn. The weirdness is in the presentation: troll-like monsters waddle around a floating platform, hovering bats cast an eerie, yellowish illumination and ambient music creates a general feeling of unease.

The strategy elements seem sound enough (though there is a fair degree of



luck and guesswork involved), but beyond this the game is simply quite depressing. And let's face it, that's something we don't have to pay for.

PCZONE VERDICT

51



Sid Meier is reportedly 'unconcerned'.

SEA WOLVES

■ \$19.95 (£10.50) | Dev: Ghost Software | www.alawar.com/games/seawolves

A VERY BASIC pirate game, *Sea Wolves* has simple controls and an arcade sensibility. You basically just sail around collecting treasure, blowing up enemy ships and raiding fortresses. As

you rack up kills you gain experience points, which can be spent instantly to upgrade your armour, firepower and speed.

The longevity of such a simple design-brief is questionable, but the graphics are agreeable enough and the handling unproblematic. Perhaps the worst thing about the game, however, is the bleary and repetitive music, which seemingly cannot be disabled and makes the whole experience nigh on unbearable. As such, what little there was to recommend the title quickly becomes irrelevant.



PCZONE VERDICT

39

REPLAY

PC ZONE presents the best (and worst) of PC games for penny-pinchers...

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

■ £9.99 | Pub: Focus Multimedia | ETA: March

BEAUTIFUL, STYLISH, innovative and somewhere in-between *Pokémon Snap*, *Little Big Adventure* and *Zelda*: we may have trumpeted *Beyond Good & Evil* so many times that our lips are chapped and swollen, but we're still going to give it another go. It tanked at retail due to its inherent French-ness, lack of guns and over-use of green lipstick, but at one penny short of a tenner you'd be criminally insane not to indulge yourself this time around – especially as it appears at No.46 in our 'Greatest Gaming Moments' feature on page 32.

Racing, stealth, puzzling, Jamaican rhinoceroses, hover-boots, a cute dog called Woof, evil alien conspiracies, bizarre

wildlife to capture on film – what's not to like? Our only issues with Jade's adventures are that they're too short and unlikely to spawn a sequel due to poor sales.

However, only the hardest of hearts can fail to warm to the plucky citizens of Hillys and their fight against the propaganda and citizen-stealing of the invading Domz. Put simply, this is the perfect budget game and it should shine out if you have limited funds, hungry mouths to feed or a skin-flinted nature. If you're a sucker for things that reviewers call 'magic' or 'wonderful', buy it straight away. It's magic and wonderful.

PCZONE VERDICT **90**

BEST BUY



The Crystal Maze gets harder.



Just like *Buck Rogers*.



Another Hubble telescope shot.

FREELANCER

■ £9.99 | Pub: Xplosiv | ETA: Out Now

NOPE, IT'S not about people who lie in bed until three o'clock in the afternoon, before getting up just in time to watch *Countdown* – *Freelancer* is an arcade galactic odyssey that set the universe ablaze when released two years ago. Digital Anvil's game

takes the *Elite* trading/shooting model and shoves a Peperami

Firestick up its arse, delivering mesmerising space battles

and open-ended trading against a storyline told through engine-based sci-fi cut-scenes. It's perhaps a little lightweight compared with *X2: The Threat*, but is more instantly gratifying – the Jerry Bruckheimer of space shooters.

PCZONE VERDICT **86**



Space = big.

GHOST MASTER

■ £4.99 | Pub: Xplosiv | ETA: Out Now

DEVELOPER Sick

Puppies has unfortunately now passed on to the other side, but an apparition from the past has appeared in the PC ZONE office in the form of its last project, *Ghost Master*. While the visuals may look like *The Sims*, this is deceptive – *Ghost Master* is actually closer to games such as *Freedom Force* and *Dungeon Keeper 2*, melding strategy, sim, puzzler and RPG into a unique 3D experience. Over 14 levels, you must use an array of ghosts to solve puzzles by manipulating/scaring the bejeezus out of the mortal humans in the buildings, by setting up traps and causing unnatural phenomena such as the summoning of dozens of spiders.

Your haunting performance generates points that are converted into plasma, and this is then used to buy new powers for your army of the dead in the appropriately-named Ghoulish Room. Packed with twisted humour and a smattering (splattering?) of toilet gags and rather spiffy spell effects, *Ghost Master* is full of imaginative gameplay ideas. You'll either love it or hate it, but for the price of a fiver, it's worth the risk of being spooked.

PCZONE VERDICT

79



Ghost Master is the anti-Sims.



Who ya gonna call?





RE-RELEASES

CRAZY TAXI 3

■ £9.99 | Pub: Xplosiv
| ETA: March

CRAZY TAXI has to be one of our favourite coin-ops of all time. It's Sega at its colourful and silly best, producing a beautifully-playable arcade racer with a simple but addictive premise – pick up and deliver various eccentric passengers to their chosen destination as quickly and spectacularly as you can, pulling off ker-razy stunts and short-cuts along the way.

The third in the series basically takes what was good in *Crazy Taxi 1 & 2* (San Francisco and New York-style cities, tons of mini-challenges, the Crazy Hop jump, multiple passenger drop-offs) and throws in four new characters plus a brand-new Vegas-at-night level called Glitter Oasis, packed with outrageous



"Where to guv?"

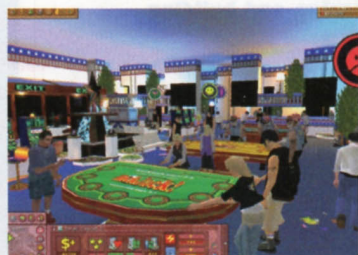


"No, I said left at junction 38..."

architecture soaked in neon glitz.

Crazy Taxi 3 is enjoyable fare (sorry), but if you've already hammered the first two games, there's not much reason to splash out on a game that Crazy Drifts along a well-worn highway – *GTA3* includes taxi missions as a mini-game, for goodness sake. Also, it's a direct port from the Xbox, so witnessing graphical pop-ups and other glitches isn't acceptable on PC nowadays. Fun, but really not worth flagging down even on budget.

PCZONE VERDICT **56**



Place your bets now.

VEGA\$: MAKE IT BIG

■ £4.99 | Pub: Xplosiv | ETA: Out Now

WELL, IT hasn't got performance by Sammy Davis Jr or Frank Sinatra, but Deep Red's casino tycoon sim does an excellent job of throwing you into the tacky glamour and corruption of the most famous gambling city in the world. *Vega\$: Make It Big* gives you the chance to create your own hedonistic entertainment empire of casinos, nightclubs, bars, restaurants and sleazy strip joints.

As in most tycoon games, the task is to plonk down buildings and infrastructure, and provide facilities to keep the punters siphoning money into your pockets. With over 20 types of guests to attract, from trailer-trash to high-rollers, you have to provide something for everyone – from

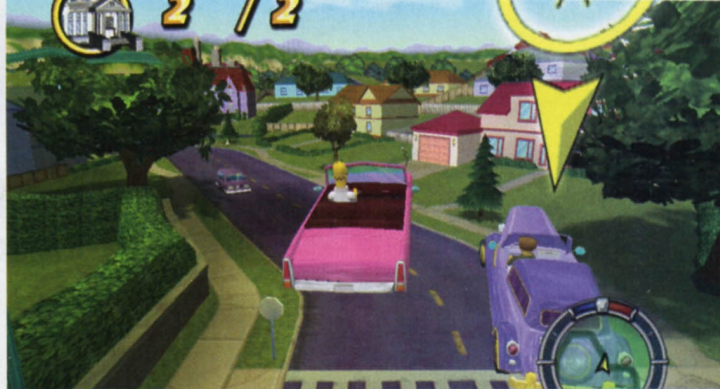


low-rent fruit machines to posh VIP suites.

You'll also be competing for trade with other businessmen, who use increasingly twisted and sneaky tactics to scupper your plans for increasing your wealth, such as hiring high-profile sports stars to stay at their hotels and building the most exciting rollercoasters on the strip.

Vega\$: Make It Big's visuals are worth the entry fee alone, enabling you to whizz around and zoom in the camera in full 3D to watch up to 5,000 individuals piss their money away on your premises. Still the best tycoon game around, and better value than the cost of five lottery tickets.

PCZONE VERDICT **85**



Look left for one of *Hit & Run's* obvious inspirations.

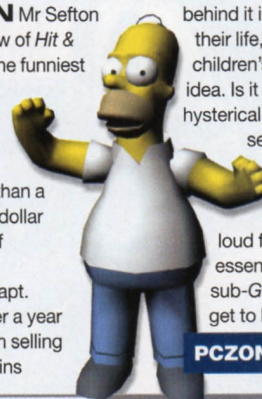
THE SIMPSONS: HIT & RUN

■ £9.99 | Pub: VU Games | ETA: Out Now

AS OUR OWN Mr Sefton said in his original review of *Hit & Run*, *The Simpsons* is the funniest thing on TV. As a result, it's packed with the best one-liners in history and although, "there's nothing better than a cigar lit with a hundred dollar bill" might not be one of Krusty's finer efforts, nothing could be more apt.

Since its release over a year ago, *Hit & Run* has been selling enough to keep the brains

behind it in doughnuts for the rest of their life, their children's lives and their children's children's lives. You get the idea. Is it good enough to warrant the hysterical spending? Well, sort of. You see, with the talent from the TV series providing their services in terms of script and voice-acting, it's laugh-out-loud funny enough to forget that essentially all you're getting is a sub-*GTA/Crazy Taxi* rip-off. And you get to kick Flanders up the arse.



PCZONE VERDICT

74

LEFTOVERS

▲ MORE FUN THAN YOU CAN SHAKE A BUDGET GAME AT

Seriously, *Wildlife Park Gold?* (Mastertronic, £9.99, Out Now.) This is a special collector's edition of a game that barely anyone's heard of to begin with and even fewer rushed out to buy. This is the basic game plus the expansion pack, which merely serves to indicate the value of gold has dropped further than any stock market analyst could have feared. 35 per cent.

On the other hand, *Grand Prix 4* (Best Of Atari, £9.99, Out Now) is definitely worthy of a special edition release, one with all sorts of Geoff Crammond-related extras, *Grand Prix* bits and bobs and other petrol-headed value. Unfortunately, this just appears to be the basic game, which is no bad thing (at this price especially), but it's been recently overtaken – ho ho – by the superior *GTR* (see p86). Still, 78 per cent for a perfectly playable racer.

Keeping up the sports theme, we come to *Cricket 2004* (EA Classic, £9.99, Out Now). This is a perfectly competent recreation of the noble art of standing in a field for a bit, although it's slightly let down in the accuracy stakes by the fact that England are only quite good. 73 per cent.

Blitzkrieg (£9.99, Xplosiv, Out Now) details another aspect of life that Britain used to be great at but now plays a distinct second fiddle in – mass global war. A real-time strategy game set during World War II (can't have enough of them), *Blitzkrieg* has a certain charm and at this price is still worth a look. 73 per cent.

Finally, we have more war from the old days and *American Conquest* (Xplosiv, £9.99, Out Now). This has *Cossacks*-type action, but it's meaningless in the long run. Much like America itself! Ho ho! We do spoil you.



Grand Prix 4: vrrroooooom!



Cricket 2004: thwack!



Blitzkreig: kaboom!

WE'RE TALKING



Voice control with natural language support

Take control as the commander of the USMC battalion through campaign episodes in Afghanistan 2001 and Iraq 2003

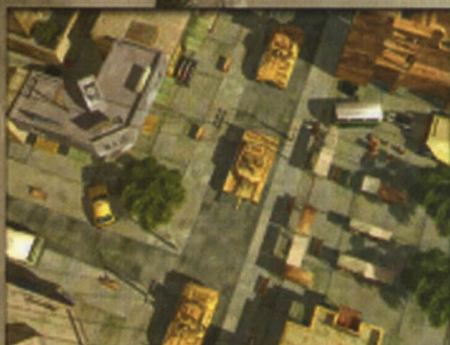
Move up the ranks, get promoted and win medals throughout the game

Missions unfolding from dawn to dusk with realistic weather conditions to contend with Over 100 different types of player controllable military units and weapon systems

Dynamic camera system puts you at the heart of the action

Ultra realistic rendered vehicles

No resource gathering and building. All action!



AND ALL-OUT WAR AT THAT. NO RESOURCE GATHERING NO BUILDING JUST ON THE MOMENT DECISIONS THAT WILL AFFECT THE LIVES OF EVERY SOLDIER ON YOUR BATTLEFIELD. CONTROL EVERY OFFENSIVE THROUGH THE REAL-TIME VOICE CONTROL VIA MICROPHONE [INCLUDED] AND MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD. WITH RAW AND REAL BATTLEFIELDS PRESENTED IN EXCEPTIONAL DETAIL WILL OF STEEL MAKES WAR SOMETHING TO SHOUT ABOUT

WILKING: WARR



INCLUDES
FREE
HEADSET



WILKING of STEEL™



YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO THE WIRED WORLD OF ONLINE GAMING

ONLINE ZONE

IT BEGINS AGAIN



■ **ONLINE EDITOR:** Paul Presley

▲ Home! Have shag-pile carpeting and velvet curtains ever tasted so sweet? With charges dropped and my good character restored, I sought and received vindication from m'lord and lady justice. Whom it also turned out had shared a buttered scone and bed berth at St Stringen's Preparatory School For The Financially Gifted and was inclined to look favourably upon one with the school tie around his neck.

Not that it was all plain sailing, mind you. The courts were delayed for several hours while janitorial staff wiped away the scorch marks, webbing and broken furniture that accompanied the case prior to my own (something to do with costumed beings and copyright issues, the details of which escape me for now). Then, with trial underway and objections flying, a misguided (but still appreciated) attempt to secure my liberation by masked members of the Inner Circle nearly threw us all into contempt, with only my pleas on their behalf seeing us through to the bitter end.

But now I'm home once more and I can't help but muse upon this army of unholy warriors I've unleashed into the virtual night. Their actions in court were the first real sign of activity I've seen from them since the ill-fated attempts to start a sinister corporation in *EVE Online*. A pitiful showing all told. I have dreams that aren't going to take over the world by themselves. I need your efforts to feed upon. So maybe some incentive is needed? Therefore I shall be offering prizes to whoever sends the best ideas for subversive online gaming acts to: online.zone@pczone.co.uk. There now, plot, plan and scheme my pretties. With my newfound underworld connections, I'm sure we can prevail!



The fanciest ice-maker in the world.



Lava lamps ahoy.

DOWN, DOWN, DEEPER AND DOWN

DARK AGE OF CAMELOT GETS A TIMELY MAKEOVER, NEW PUBLISHER

FOR OVER three years now it's been the little MMOG that could, gamely plugging away and building a steady audience despite an almost complete lack of publicity and hype. Now though, like a supporting understudy hastily being brushed up due to the drunken incapacity of the genre's leading stars, *Dark Age Of Camelot* is making headlines everywhere thanks to both a complete graphical update in the latest expansion pack, *Catacombs*, and a new publisher handling marketing and distribution in the UK.

Catacombs takes the existing *DAOC* graphics engine and overhauls everything, from the skin textures of your characters, to the blades of grass fluttering in the virtual breeze. Animations, ambient sounds and backdrops also get a fresh lick of paint and you can now change every aspect of your alter-ego's appearance, from nose length to eye colour. While the

game may not be quite up to *EverQuest II* standards of visual richness, it's definitely been designed to make *DAOC* competitive with the majority of current MMOs.

DAWN OF THE DEAD

But it's not just visual. *Catacombs* also brings fresh content to the fore, with 15 new underground dungeons to explore, each with different themes and challenges for players of all levels. Developer Mythic has also jumped onto the 'instanced zone' bandwagon, finally providing randomly-populated scaled adventures for private groups. The whole pack has been designed to provide you with an easier levelling experience, especially handy if you experiment with one of the five new character classes on offer.

Yes, Midgardians can jump into the shiny boots of Valkyries and Warlocks, Hibernians can chill out (ho ho) with

Vampiirs and Bainshees, while Albion denizens get to defy the gods playing as a Heretic. All classes feature brand new skills and abilities, including combination spells and creepy player resurrection abilities that bring dead team-mates back as horrible zombie types.

To date, *DAOC* has attracted over 350,000 European players in the three years since it was launched, with peak times attracting as many as 20,000 consecutive users across the range of EU servers (usually 2,000-4,000 in the UK). Mythic has been very clear about where it wants to take the game, and a sequel is definitely not on the cards. The goal for new UK publisher Hip Interactive is to make sure that the existing game gets the attention it deserves through promotion and in-store marketing, a heady task indeed with *World Of Warcraft* now on sale in the UK. We'll have a full review of *Catacombs* next issue, along with the full client for you to sample on our discs.



London Underground by night.



■ **Publisher:** Hip Interactive
■ **Developer:** Mythic Entertainment
■ **ETA:** March
■ **Website:** www.darkageofcamelot.com



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ONLINE PREVIEW
Pirates Of The Burning Sea



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READERS' CHALLENGE
Who's the daddy? Find out here



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PS: AFTERSHOCK
Here come the robot fellas



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NEVERQUEST
WOW works its magic on Hill

Romanes Eunt Domus

MYTHIC CHANGES HISTORY AND HEADS FOR A NEW FRONTIER

SINCE IT'S traditional to start any news piece about a game featuring the Romans with a *Life Of Brian* quote, I'll leap right in by asking, what have the Romans ever done for us? Well, they overextended their imperious reach leading to a total collapse from within and the fall of their empire, for one. Had they managed to organise things a little better though, there's little doubt that we'd be living under a Pax Romana to this very day and, according to new sci-fi MMO *Imperator* from Mythic, would continue to do so into the far-flung future.

Imperator sends the Roman Empire thousands of years in the future, spanning the stars and facing new alien threats from both across the galaxy and within its borders. Classic Roman themes will prevail in the design, but adapted to life in future, such as Praetorian Guardsmen using bio-adaptive



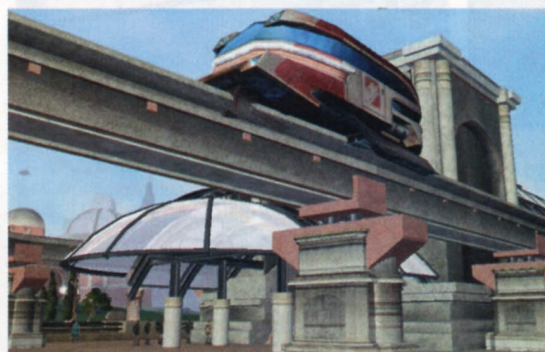
body armour. While the main game is PvE in nature, the bloodthirsty nature of Roman sporting events will provide you with plenty of PvP-themed action. The Flavian amphitheatre, for instance, provides Coliseum-style gladiatorial combat for characters to enjoy. Although not FPS in nature, the plan is to make combat faster in pace than traditional RPG games. Space travel also plays a huge part in the game, but Mythic has stated that there are no



plans at present to include any *Jump To Lightspeed*-style space combat action.

Visually, *Imperator* will be using the same engine as *DAOC: Catacombs* (see left), meaning that as advances are made in one game, they can easily be ported over to update the other. *Imperator* is pencilled in for this winter, but it's early days yet - we'll keep you updated.

■ Publisher: Mythic Entertainment
■ Developer: Mythic Entertainment
■ ETA: Winter 2005
■ Website: www.imperatoronline.com



Better than the metro system of today's Rome.

THE A-Z OF MMOs

ONLINE GAMING EXPLAINED

B is for Beta Tests, the second most important stage in any MMO's development (the first being the late-night drunken boast by an unemployed games programmer to his still EA-contracted friends that he doesn't "need their dirty corporate money, man. I can do this on my own, you'll see. I've got big ideas, I tell you. Big! I know where the future is...", before falling off his barstool). The beta test is where most MMOs first realise their grand dreams of doing anything original at all with the genre are doomed to failure, and that to survive they'll have to revert to a basic *EverQuest* game mechanic model and not try for a real-time *Tekken*-style fighting model and psychic-based totally freeform magic system. To be on the safe side, it's also here that they realise they'd best ditch that undersea setting and build themselves a swords-and-sorcery fantasy world too.

Beta tests are also the public's first port of call with most MMOs, being invited in limited numbers of several thousand at a time to test the technology, push the server capacity to the limit and run around moaning that the game is buggy, untested and beneath their contempt, despite that being the reason they're there in the first place.

B is also for Bankruptcy, which is the inevitable destination for nine out of ten MMO development studios, especially those that don't learn the lessons of the beta test and plough on regardless with their 'vision'...

WIN! WORLD OF WARCRAFT

Ten copies of the popular PC game up for grabs!

NOW THAT we European adventurers have finally been allowed to join the 600,000 US and Korean *World Of Warcraft* fans, we here at PC ZONE have decided to throw caution to the wind and celebrate. We've joined with the happy gnomes of VU Games to unearth ten copies of the game to give away to you. Yes, you! *WOW* scored a whopping 95 per cent in our last issue, earning a coveted PC ZONE Classic award and establishing it firmly in the big league of next generation MMOs. To win one of the ten copies, simply answer the following question:

What are the massive PvP playing areas in *World Of Warcraft* called?

- A: Battlefields
- B: Battlegrounds
- C: Killing Fields

Send your answer before March 30 on the back of a postcard or envelope to:
World Of Warcraft compo,
PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6PF. For full competition terms and conditions, see page 7.



CLAN DIARY

SCEE SCEE

ANNE ROGERS, aka Jaffy
www.scee-clan.co.uk

So many LANs, so little time! The scene is busy right now, and the team has been looking into what tournaments to enter, and which to ditch. Gravesend's GamesGenius LAN 5 looks to be a cert, but with teams such as LastChance and BLACKLIGHT in attendance it could prove difficult. Also upcoming is Multiplay's i23 in Newbury. With both CS 1.6 and CS: Source events running in parallel, it should be interesting to see if the new game is nearer to being tournament-ready. In addition to this, Manchester's ever-popular UniCon LAN centre will be upping the ante with its largest event yet – the UniCon National LAN Championships – with a total prize purse of over £5,000.

We have recently got involved in a brilliant partnership with #no-servers (on Quakenet.org IRC) who are providing us with

"The Scandinavians have always been ahead of the rest of Europe in terms of Internet connections – at last the playing field is more level"



International borders are no barrier anymore.

a top quality C-S server. On my 10MB Internet connection it feels like LAN, which is so rare when online. Do check them out at www.no-servers.net. Even [SCEE*L]Mia – now back home in Denmark after a few months freeloaded at [SCEE*L]Happy-Bunny's house – gets a low ping and good bullet registry.

It's great that nowadays you can play alongside people in other countries as if they were in the same room with you. This is good for female teams especially, where sourcing skilled members is difficult, but it brings its own problems. Regular LAN activities can prove tricky if you need members to travel abroad to participate. The Scandinavians have always been ahead of the rest of Europe in terms of Internet connections – at last the playing field is a bit more level, making European online competitions a far more viable option. Hopefully the SCEE Ladies can absorb some more foreign talent and impress online and at LAN this year!

VIRGIN HEROES

UK CITY OF HEROES LAUNCH CELEBRATED

THE EUROPEAN launch of *City Of Heroes* finally took place on February 4, and to help celebrate the event (and promote the game), NCsoft's UK staff took over the games section of Virgin's flagship London Megastore.

For the Virgin and NCsoft staff, most of the two-day event was spent contending with eager fans bellowing "I love City Of Heroes!" in a desperate attempt to win a signed poster. Other giveaways included a goodie bag (including COH-branded hoodies, T-shirts and stickers) for the first 50 people to buy a copy of the game each day, and a limited-edition Statesman HeroClix figure for members of the COH online forum that identified

themselves. One or two fans even turned up 'in costume', proving their love of the game and earning special kudos.

The launch had been eagerly awaited throughout Europe, who until now had only had access to the distant US servers. Early sales had been impressive, with orders coming from as far away as Dubai for units to be shipped over. Even better news is that Issue 4 of the game is set to launch in March, and bring PvP arena combat to the game for the first time.



Virgin Megastore gets heroic.



The fight begins in March.

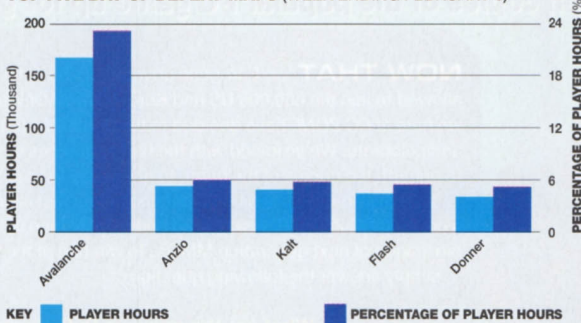
STATZONE

A LOOK AT THE DATA SHAPING YOUR ONLINE WORLD

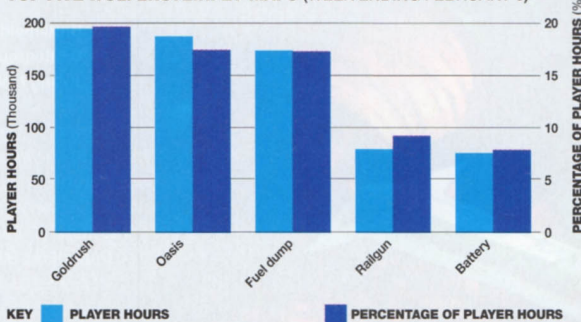
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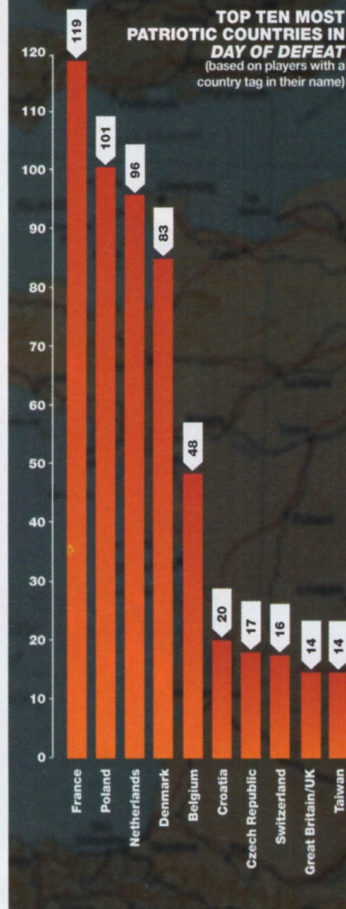
TOP FIVE DAY OF DEFEAT MAPS (WEEK ENDING FEBRUARY 6)



TOP FIVE WOLFENSTEIN: ET MAPS (WEEK ENDING FEBRUARY 6)



TOP TEN MOST PATRIOTIC COUNTRIES IN DAY OF DEFEAT (based on players with a country tag in their name)



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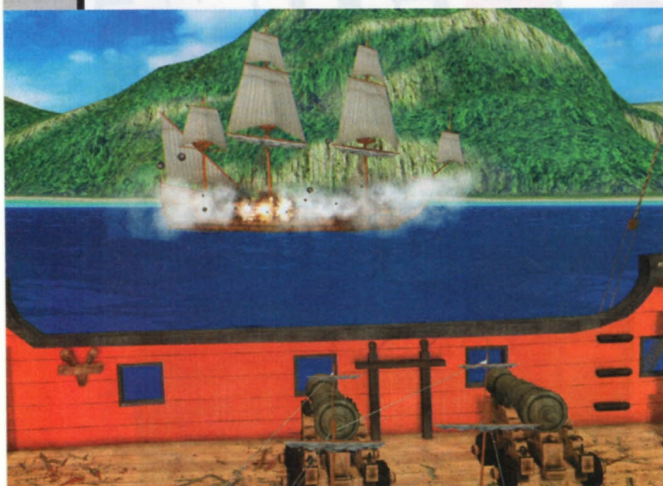
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Try getting that into a bottle...

Booty call...

PIRATES OF THE BURNING SEA

Richie Shoemaker finds an online RPG with a totally tropical taste

JUST AS NOT every football fan supports the same team, not every online gamer wants to exist in a persistent world populated by goblins and wizards. Statistical weight is added to the argument by the fact that of the many MMOGs that have been consigned to the scrap heap in recent months, the majority have been of a fantasy nature.

With this in mind and with feelings of fantasy fatigue settling in the pits of our stomachs after a double Xmas helping of *EQII* and *WOW*, it's with some relief that we look forward to Flying Lab Software's first MMO effort; a swashbuckling simulation of 18th century seafaring, plundering and colonial flag-waving called *Pirates Of The Burning Sea*. And while comparisons with a certain other piracy-

themed game are unavoidable, Flab (as we like to call the company) is going all out to ensure its own buccaneering spirit shines through.

"We really love Sid Meier's games," admits executive producer Russell Williams, "but his approach to the genre is very different from ours. He's going for a more arcade-like combat experience, whereas our approach is much more

authentic and demanding. We're looking for players who relish a challenge, a real battle of wits with human opponents. If you found *Master And Commander* as thrilling as we did, you're going to be a very happy gamer."

PRIME FACTION

Who you decide to ally yourself with is a cornerstone of the game. Whether you

fight and trade for the English, Spanish or French (or indeed, all or none of the above), the fact that you can help defend and take over important ports and towns ensures that, away from all the usual NPC missions and guild skirmishes, a war is being constantly waged for the region's abundant resources. If you help one side take a settlement from another, you can expect to be handsomely rewarded.

PLAY THE GAME

"Instead of experience points, you earn faction points with the various groups you belong to," explains Williams. "Your career might be with the British Navy, but you could also belong to the king's spies, the Knights Templar conspiracy and the Anti-Pirate League. As you play, you earn points with each of your factions and they may supply you with ships, equipment, officers, skill training and more." He adds: "There's no whacking on dolphins with paddles for 12 hours before you can upgrade to a +1 Paddle. You can fight NPCs out in the world or in the course of missions, racking up faction points and improving your character and ship."

As there will be no crafting of items, land exploration or settlement construction (not initially at least), the

THE DETAILS

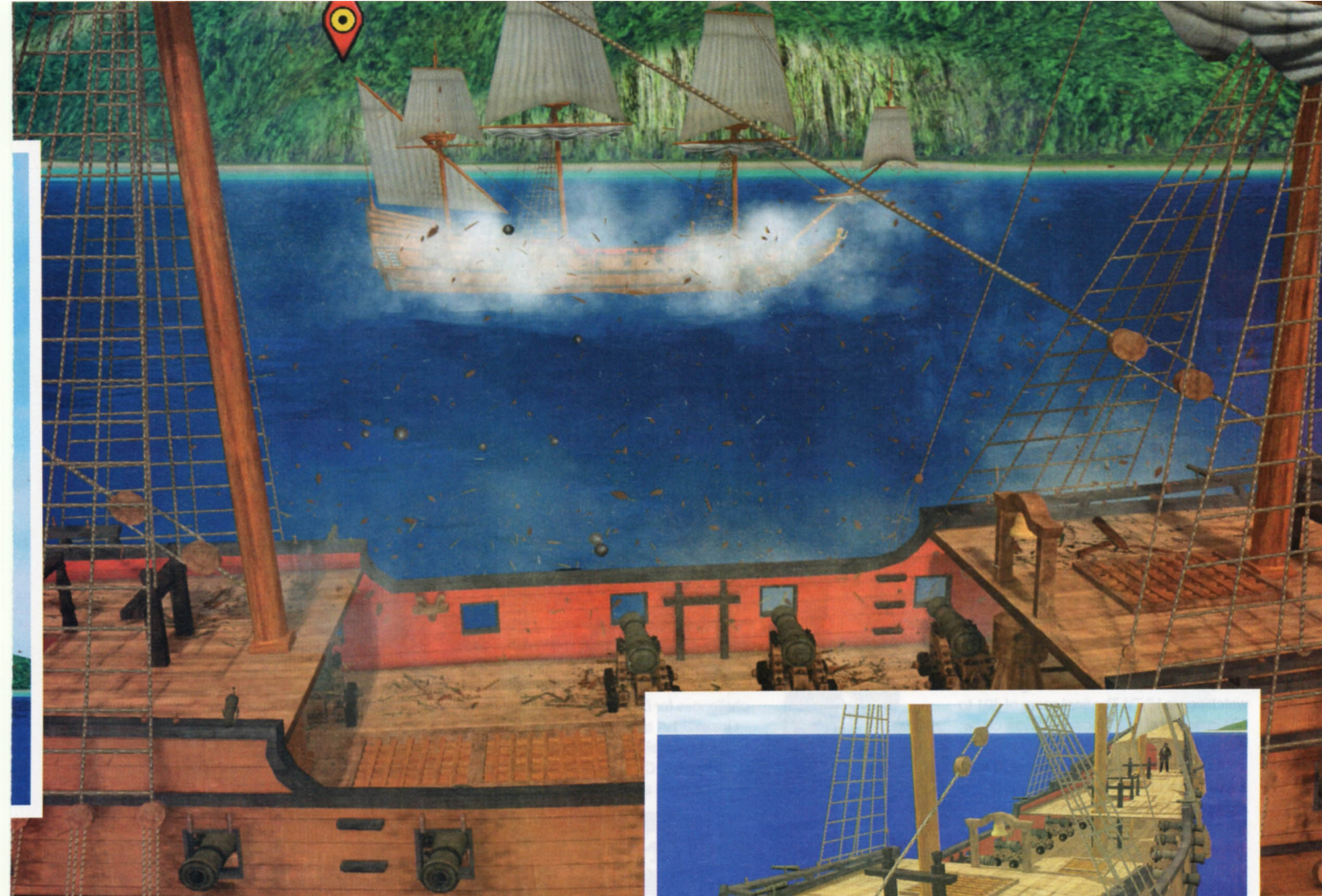
DEVELOPER Flying Lab Software
PUBLISHER Flying Lab Software
WEBSITE www.burningsea.com
ETA November 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Highly tactical ship-to-ship combat model
- Unique online setting
- Dynamic faction standings
- Ruthless PvP environment



A spliced mainbrace, yesterday.



Curse those new-fangled ghost ships.

"Pirates never asked permission to attack. They simply took what they wanted or died trying"

RUSSELL WILLIAMS EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, POTBS

game will be set exclusively at sea or in port, with you in command of your ship at all times rather than in control of an avatar. Trading and combat are the only career options open to the new player, which is why the developer is aiming to get both aspects absolutely spot-on. One obviously welcome feature, considering the subject matter, is that the game will be unapologetically Player versus Player in nature.

DASTARDLY DOERS

"Pirates did not become the scourge of the seas by asking permission to attack. They took what they wanted or died trying," says Williams, warning to his

game's theme. "No, the law of the sea is to be bloody, bold and resolute. In our game, England, France and Spain battle for control of Caribbean riches. Pirates slip through the fray, plucking the ripest fruit and duelling with the brave naval captains who oppose them. PvP is a major part of our gameplay."

Williams mentions that the game is set to feature over two dozen varieties of ship, from sloops and brigantines to frigates and galleons – each varying in speed, firepower, turn rate, cannon capacity, reload time and cargo space. Other factors also come into play, like crew and the skills of your officers, modifications made to your ship and the skills you learn



Plenty of rigging, but surprisingly little friggng going on.

in the game as a ship's captain.

"You can buy paint to apply custom colour schemes to your ship or dye to change the colour of your sails, and you can create and upload your own original sail emblems for everyone to see. Your ship won't look like anyone else's, and it won't sail or fight like anyone else's either."

WE ARE SAILING

"Our combat system is not like most MMOGs," continues Williams. "You move and fire in real time, and angle and distance are critical. If you can 'cross the T' by sailing perpendicular to the enemy, then when you fire your cannonballs, you can rip through multiple sails, masts,

cannon and crew. Each shot can damage something and keep moving, blowing holes through both sides of the enemy or wreaking havoc on hull, cannons and crew alike. Your skills affect your chances to hit and how effective your shots are, but it's the moment-to-moment decisions that really win battles. Character skills and equipment are important, but so is player skill."

56K NO WAY

We're reminded of *EVE Online*'s model of ship-to-ship combat, but in *POTBS*, positioning, speed, heading and even the skills of your officers will be crucial factors. As Williams concludes: "You always have to think a few steps ahead." With the code having to take all these variables into account, it's little wonder the game is for broadband users only.

Currently, *Pirates Of The Burning Sea* is preparing to weigh anchor by the end of the year, with beta testing due to commence sometime in the autumn. With most of the big guns of the MMOG sector having fired already, it looks like Flying Lab Software will be unopposed in releasing one of the biggest and most unique MMO releases of the year – and with nary a goblin in sight, maybe one of the most popular too. **[E]**

SEA SKILLS

YOU ARE YOUR CREW AND YOUR CREW ARE YOU

Pirates Of The Burning Sea takes an interesting approach to skills. There are two kinds: the skills of your officers, which affect the characteristics of your ship; and your skills as a captain, which are increased in the traditional manner by completing certain tasks.

"You use your personal skillset to train your crew," explains executive producer Russell Williams. "Each time you visit port, you can choose which of your skills to drill your crew in. If you're heading out to a major fleet battle, you can use your gunnery skills to optimise your crew's combat effectiveness. If you then do some trade missions, use your sailing skills to retrain your crew to optimise their ship handling abilities. You're the captain of the ship, but it's your crew who do the grunt work and you decide how best to focus them from mission to mission."



Virtual Skipper it ain't.

PCZONE READERS' CHALLENGE

WIN
BIG
PRIZES!!

Bag 'em, grab 'em, nab 'em, frag 'em...

FIRST THE bad news. Our *Joint Operations: Escalation* tournament is still proving to be a nightmare of gremlins and technical hitches and so was held over once more, now to appear in round six. The good news though, is that the three remaining games in round five were of such high calibre (and scorelines) that few people seem to mind.

The *Day Of Defeat* 6v6 cup proved to be a mammoth success, with some of the toughest-fought matches yet seen in the whole Readers' Challenge. After narrowly seeing off Clan Zpoint by 587 to 542 in the semis, eventual winners Clan HIID took on the much fancied Clan Unplugged, who had thrashed their semi-final opponents Clan Pmers 1350 to 329. The final was tense, tight and taken to the very limit, much to the appreciation of the 133-strong audience watching via HLTV. The final score of 491 to 424 in favour of HIID shows just how close it was. Great stuff.

As for the *Painkiller* 1v1 matches, it was a case of vengeance is sweet for victor Alexander 'Ztrider' Ingrav who saw off fellow finalist Matt 'Jabb0r' Osborn 17-15 and 30-1. Ingrav had lost out in the *Painkiller* final back in round three and had been itching for a second bite at the cherry. Ingrav will now be taking his skills to the CPL World Tour in Turkey later this

month. Audio commentary on every match was once again provided by Team Sportscast Network (www.tsncentral.com), so many thanks for that.

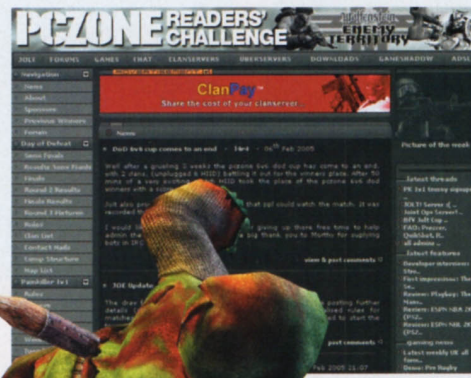
Finally, the *Half-Life 2* Team Deathmatch 4v4 matches also saw some high-scoring encounters, with eventual finalists Quietstorm and Sons Of Law again taking things right to the wire in both legs of the final. Sons Of Law came out on top by just 126-123 and 125-110, a close-run thing indeed. Congratulations to all winners and hearty commiserations to all the defeated finalists.

As always, a big thank you goes out to the many admins for these matches, and especially L4r4, Biffy and Lady Scarlet for the overall control.

Round six is currently being played, but head over to www.pczone.jolt.co.uk for details of round seven, in which we'll be accepting challenges for *Day Of Defeat* 6v6 (again), *Quake 3* 1v1 deathmatches and games of relative newcomer *Republic Commando*. Should be quite a blast!



The *Day Of Defeat* challenge saw some tough matches.



SIGN UP AT
www.pczone.jolt.co.uk
TODAY!



Republic Commando is round seven. Should be a blast.

READERS' CHALLENGE IS PROUDLY SPONSORED BY THE FOLLOWING COMPANIES

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RESULTS

DAY OF DEFEAT - 6V6

QUARTER-FINALS (MAP - DONNER)

| | | |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| MYOR | 319 - 862 | PMERS |
| HIID | 905 - 285 | NORTH |
| PROPHETS | 450 - 646 | UNPLUGGED |
| ZPOINT | 627 - 306 | SKYRIDERS |

SEMI-FINALS (MAP - HARRINGTON)

| | | |
|--------|------------|-----------|
| ZPOINT | 542 - 587 | HIID |
| PMERS | 329 - 1350 | UNPLUGGED |

FINAL (MAP - CHEMILLE)

| | | |
|------|-----------|-----------|
| HIID | 491 - 424 | UNPLUGGED |
|------|-----------|-----------|

WINNERS: HIID

PAINKILLER - DEATHMATCH 1V1

QUARTER-FINALS (MAP - ABSINTHE)

| | | |
|----------|---------|---------|
| BLUEFOOT | 19 - 3 | BRESICA |
| CLAINS | 16 - 29 | JABBOR |
| SUQX3S | 7 - 16 | SHADISH |
| ZHRANCE | 6 - 10 | ZTRIDER |

SEMI-FINALS (MAP - PSYCHO)

| | | |
|----------|---------|---------|
| BLUEFOOT | 12 - 18 | JABBOR |
| SHADISH | 0 - 20 | ZTRIDER |

FINAL (MAPS - SACRED & ABSINTHE)

| | | |
|--------|---------|---------|
| JABBOR | 15 - 17 | ZTRIDER |
| JABBOR | 1 - 30 | ZTRIDER |

WINNER: ZTRIDER

HALF LIFE 2 - TEAM DEATHMATCH 4V4

SEMI-FINALS FIRST LEG (MAP - OVERWATCH)

| | | |
|-------------|----------|-------------|
| SONS OF LAW | 193 - 70 | FDISK |
| QUIETSTORM | 189 - 56 | SNEAKY MICE |

SEMI-FINALS SECOND LEG (MAP - LOCKDOWN)

| | | |
|-------------|----------|-------------|
| SONS OF LAW | 147 - 74 | FDISK |
| QUIETSTORM | 159 - 41 | SNEAKY MICE |

FINAL (MAPS - OVERWATCH & LOCKDOWN)

| | | |
|------------|-----------|-------------|
| QUIETSTORM | 123 - 126 | SONS OF LAW |
| QUIETSTORM | 110 - 125 | SONS OF LAW |

WINNERS: SONS OF LAW



E-SPORTING LIFE

All the latest news from the wide, wide world of professional gaming. Your man at the E-Sports desk - Philip Wride

The action has kicked off in Korea for the new World E-Sports Games League, with 4Kings being one of only two European teams invited. Their *Counter-Strike* team managed to progress through the initial group stage with a narrow victory over the CPL Winter champions NoA. At the time of writing, they now find themselves in a group with Mousesports from Germany, Maven from Korea and ABIT-Strike from China. Their *Warcraft 3* contingent are also progressing well and are holding up the UK end of things.

Other news that will affect the CPL *Painkiller* World Tour is that China has decided to ban 50 games with *Painkiller* being one of them. We have yet to hear how this will alter the tour destinations, but rumours are that that part of it will get moved to another Asian country. The first leg in Istanbul is just around the corner, followed closely by Barcelona. All of the major competitors have begun their heavy practice schedules in an attempt to line their back pockets and oust Dutch superstar Vo0, the *Painkiller* World Champion.



The 4Kings team get some training in ahead of the Korean matches.

The good news for UK gamers is that Team-UK beat Sweden in the all-important Clanbase Nations Cup Final for *Counter-Strike*. They came up against their old rivals in Sweden but took the fight to them, scraping through by the skin of their teeth in the last round. Good on you boys!

On a final note, arguably the world's number one E-Sports team, SK-Gaming has taken a diversion and announced they will be creating a US *World Of Warcraft* division. It's still unclear however, how they plan to organise this and incorporate it into the rest of the SK structure. More soon.



The World E-Sports Games League prepares for business.

FIGHT CLUB



FIRST RULE OF FIGHT CLUB: PC ZONE OWNZ JØØ FIGHT CLUB MODERATORS: METALFACE, REX MUNDI & GOWERLY

New year, same old game. *Counter-Strike: Source* reared its head again for this month's Fight Club, although we needn't have fretted as it was one of the most enjoyable evenings of pseudo-military mayhem yet seen. This was partly down to the mixed level of skill on show from everyone – ensuring a nice, wide-open game – but mainly because we merged our two regular C-S servers into one big, giant gaming arena, allowing for 32 players to join in at once. A ban on snipers also helped immensely, meaning that for once the ZONE team could stay alive for more than 20 seconds per map, and even manage to get the odd kill or two (despite Will's valiant attempts to maintain the status quo). In fact, Prezzer's shotgun rampages on Cobble managed to significantly raise the team average, along with sterling performances from the newest members of ZONE's ever-burgeoning online family, Sam Kielsen and Philip Wride.

You lot didn't do too badly either. Alright, you kicked arse. Big time. With the increased server size and the

constant turnaround of players, there's just not enough space to list everyone who stood out, but amongst the dozens and dozens of notable players, the –[DOA]– and Sector7G clan members, the regulars from DearWandy.com (DWC) and the awesome skills of K.I.T. certainly made it a night to remember.

Special thanks also to Dredj for guiding Prezzer through Office and alerting him to an onrush of enemies by shouting "RUN PREZZER, RUN!" only to watch your online editor stumble over his own two feet and get picked off with ease. C'est la vie.

Next up is *Joint Ops* and we'll have a report next issue on the 150-player fun there. Take your pick from upcoming Fight Clubs (see right) and as always, you can find all the connection details you could ask for over at www.zonegames.co.uk. You can also chat with your fellow combatants on the ZONE site forums at www.pczone.co.uk, so why not discuss other entertaining ways to shoot Prezzer?

COME & 'AVE A GO!
www.zonegames.co.uk
for all the info

UPCOMING FIGHT CLUB EVENTS

THURSDAY MARCH 31

6.30pm – 8.30pm

Red Orchestra (full version of *UT2004* needed)

THURSDAY APRIL 28

6.30pm – 8.30pm

Counter-Strike: Source

All details subject to change. Be sure to check www.zonegames.co.uk for the latest information

WHO'S WHO

| | |
|----------------|-------------------------|
| Dave Woods | Kid Unknown |
| Jamie Sefton | Northern Scum |
| Paul Presley | Prezzer |
| Will Porter | Batsphinx |
| Suzy Wallace | Uzibat |
| Jamie Malcolm | JimLad |
| Anthony Holden | Shokupan |
| Martin Korda | Nameless One |
| Phil Wand | People's Front Of Judea |
| Michael Filby | Parallax |
| Sam Kielsen | BoyWonda |
| Philip Wride | Wride |
| Stu Bishop | Banzai |



Sam Kielsen and Philip Wride brought honour to the ZONE name.



K.I.T. proved to be the night's best player.



Creative tagging from Kermit.



The 32-player server made for some thrilling encounters.



ZONECHAT

BECAUSE PHONING YOU ALL WOULD COST TOO MUCH...



ANOTHER PACKED ZONE Chat last month, our first since the New Year's break. Much joy and merriment was had, with topics ranging from building your own *Half-Life 2* Deathmatch maps, Will's musical tastes, the joys of our regular Fight Club events (see left) and suggestions for your own personal favourite ultimate gaming moments (check out our feature on page 32).

We also saw the return of the Super Spectacular 6.30pm Super Prize Giveaway this month. The rewards on offer were a copy of *Scrapland*, an exclusive limited-edition *Scrapland* robot head figurine and a copy of the official Prima guide to *Half-Life 2* (can anyone say 'random'?). Second prize was a copy of *Scrapland*. As is now the way, a hastily uploaded picture of Will doing

something funny needed captioning – and the winning entry came from Christopher Kinnerley of Harrow, the second best from Chris Sedlmayr or Exeter. Well done to both.

Next month we'll bring you a report from February's ZONE Chat with all the fun and games therein. To be a part of that,

March's or indeed any ZONE Chat, or just to join your fellow ZONE readers in a relaxed atmosphere of communicative technology, just

get hold of a good IRC program, log

on to one of the Quakenet servers, then type

/join #pcz and you're there. The channel is open 24/7, and the ZONE staffers have even been known to pop in from time to time to say hello, have a metaphorical pint, and grab a slice of Black Forest Chat-eau (*Getting worse – Ed*).

**WEDNESDAY
MARCH 30
5PM – 7PM**

LAN ROVER

Steve Randall had a little LAN, its fleece was white as snow

■ www.badlanrising.com is holding LAN 17 ('Uncommon Valour') on March 11-13 at the Marton Hotel and Country Club, Middlesbrough. There are spaces for 180 players and a full payment of £35 is required in advance.

■ www.fatboyfan.co.uk is on from March 4-6 in Padworth for 31 gamers. It costs £20 for the entire event – expect to pay more if you want to hire a monitor.

■ www.flintfrag.co.uk is having another one-day event on March 13, from 10am till 10pm. It's at the usual venue – the Holiday Inn, North Wales, on the A55. I feel like I'm always plugging them and I'm not even related – they're just very organised.

■ www.hglan.co.uk is planning an Easter event on March 25-27, so you can play for three days and still have Monday at home to recover. It's £20 a head, bring your own drink/food/PC etc. They'll provide the prizes, the laughs are usually at each other (unless Slippery Jim turns up, natch).

■ www.lamalan.co.uk in Walderslade, Chatham, Kent must have the best design for a T-shirt. The latest event takes place on April 1-3. Expect the 32 places to fill at £20, as it is a popular event for both newcomers and regulars.

■ The ever-popular www.multiplay.co.uk is still doing mammoth business, but you can never get enough plugs, so – i23 has 900 places, it's at Newbury Racecourse, March 25-28, around £70.

■ www.scotlandparty.com is counting down to Scotlan 14 (no doubt Englan 15 then) from March 25-27 in Aberdeen for 40 players. £20 in advance or £25 at the door. There is video footage of previous events on the website, so if you have a decent connection you can see what all the fuss is about.

■ If you want your party to feature here drop me a line, with at least two months advance notice, the details of numbers, costs and location at scalper@gglan.co.uk. Scalper out.

GUILDHALL



▲ LOOKING FOR THAT SPECIAL SOMEONE?

There are dozens of like-minded souls out there, from professional money-making clans to cosy groups of fans who just like a laugh. If you're looking to form a gang of your own, just send your details to the address below.

CLAN =DB4D= (Death B4 Dishonour)

CONTACT chequered@deathb4dishonour.co.uk

WEBSITE www.deathb4dishonour.co.uk

MAIN GAMES *Day Of Defeat, Battlefield Vietnam*

DETAILS We're a clan that's been going strong for over a year, successful in many cups, with a popular server in the top 20 in the UK. We're currently looking for over 18s to expand on our *Battlefield Vietnam* faction. Friendly and dedicated members required.

CLAN CTO -JRR(-

CONTACT ATiFanatic@gmail.com

WEBSITE www.rebelresistance.org

MAIN GAMES *Counter-Strike: Source, Desert Combat*

DETAILS We're a big clan with four *Desert Combat* servers, one CS: *Source* server and two *Ventrilo* servers. If you want to join there's just a short trial and you're in! We have weekly training and matches! Come on in!

CLAN Monkehs

CONTACT dsa_uk@lineone.net

WEBSITE www.monkehs.com

MAIN GAMES *PlanetSide, Counter-Strike: Source, World Of Warcraft, City Of Heroes*

DETAILS A mature clan established from the legacy of a *PlanetSide* outfit. A number of us have moved on from *PlanetSide* to other games that take our fancy. We have *TeamSpeak* and a CS: *Source* server at the moment. Join the forums and post whatever you think may amuse and amaze us. We will be happy to welcome you into the monkeh house.

CLAN RS0BB

CONTACT [RS0BB]-Evil Ed via the forum

WEBSITE www.bumbandits.net

MAIN GAMES *Call Of Duty, United Offensive, Medal Of Honor: Breakthrough and Pacific Assault, Battlefield 1942, Counter Strike: Source*

DETAILS We are a 200-strong clan with around 350 forum members from all over the world and growing. We don't recruit on ability, so it doesn't matter how good or bad you are – what matters is that you want to enjoy playing games, matches and HAVE FUN!

CLAN Friendly Forces

CONTACT magnu@ffclan.co.uk

WEBSITE www.ffclan.co.uk

MAIN GAMES *Unreal Tournament 2003 and 2004*

DETAILS Friendly Forces welcomes new members of all skill levels. We have dedicated teams for most game types. We also offer training and assistance in all aspects of the game and run our own servers. We play above all for fun, and ask only for a good attitude.

CLAN The Q Continuum

CONTACT theqcontinuum@hotmail.com

WEBSITE www.theqcontinuum.com

MAIN GAMES *Battlefield 1942, Battlefield Vietnam, Freelancer, Icewind Dale 1 and 2 and many more*

DETAILS We are a multi-gaming clan with members from across the globe. We run our own TS2 server, and are always on the lookout for new members who like a laugh and a joke. Due to the games we play we only accept players over the age of 18.

To feature in Guildhall simply send your details and no more than 50 words describing your group to online.zone@pczone.co.uk (subject line: GUILDHALL) or to Guildhall, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6FP.



Good old New Con. Fighting the good fight.



The new map screen. Now useful.



"I'm looking for a Mr Cop? A Mr RoboCop?"



Orville finally learns how to fly.

PLANETSIDE: AFTERSHOCK

■ Free upgrade (requires active *PlanetSide* subscription) | Pub: Sony Online Entertainment | Dev: Ubisoft | ETA: Out Now | www.planetside.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM, a 32MB 3D card, an Internet connection, a copy of *PlanetSide* and *PlanetSide: Core Combat*

DESIRES P4 1.6GHz, 512MB RAM, a 128MB 3D card and a broadband Internet connection

Richie Shoemaker re-enlists in the battle for Auraxis, in the hope of discovering the Mechs' big thing

MUCH HAS changed in the two years since the world's first and only massively multiplayer first-person shooter went live, and yet, much hasn't. If you've been dipping in and out of the game, steadily rising through the ranks, the changes to play balance will have been obvious. But for those who signed up at launch only to find themselves fighting an endless stalemate, it will seem to re-enlisters as if the fight for control

of Auraxis is as depressingly futile as ever.

It's underneath the surface that all the changes have taken place. In 2003 Sony released the *Core Combat* expansion pack – a shambolic and disorientating addition that took the battle pointlessly underground. Since then Sony has effectively been fixing things, and the big spanner that it eventually came up with was *BattleFrame* Robotics, giant walking war machines.

In truth, BFRs are an awesome addition to the game. They look suitably imposing and they can certainly give and

giant mechanical trousers, it's far more satisfying to take the buggers down with grenades and rocket launchers.

ALL YOUR BASE

The real issues that have bugged *PlanetSide* have still to be properly addressed. The war for Auraxis is still not persistent, nor is it a satisfactorily winnable one. Two years ago we berated the game because the battles were all set around bases, the bases all looked the same and when a base or continent was won, ultimately it would all be for

immense fun (in the right company), but bridges, hills, trenches – all valid real-world military objectives, are simple waypoints players pass through to get to where the real action is. Ninety per cent of most maps are never used and yet rather than put some purpose into these areas, Sony prefers to further ram its fatally flawed concept of subterranean skirmishing down our throats.

With *UT2004* offering better graphics, faster and diverse gameplay and far better value, it would be all too easy to defer any praise for *PlanetSide* but for one aspect – teamwork. There isn't another game that comes close to matching the level of camaraderie fostered by a well-drilled outfit of squads and platoons lead from on high. For this alone *PlanetSide* is worthy of investment, but it's unlikely your tour of duty will extend past a couple of months. **PCZ**

INPERSPECTIVE

JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING

Reviewed Issue 145, Score 83%
Set in the Indonesian jungle, *Joint Ops* offers battles far bigger in scale than any other online FPS (bar *PlanetSide*), with up to 150 players in any one map. Vehicles don't dominate the game either, which is a very good thing.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

Reviewed Issue 138, Score 93%
UT now has vehicles, massive maps set across vast outdoor battlefields, and monthly fees that wouldn't even bother a homeless person (ie none). It's not quite in the same epic league as its contemporaries, but for all-out fast and frantic arcade gunning, nothing else comes close.

"There isn't another game that comes close to matching the level of camaraderie here"

receive a great deal of punishment. The problem is that in order to be able to pilot one, you have to spend hours and hours engaged in *Core Combat* in order to earn your licence. Frankly, it's not worth the effort, because as much fun as it is to stomp around the battlefield in

nothing as the next day the enemy would take it back. Little has changed. There is no real concept of a front line, there's no terrain deformation, and weather has much less impact on the game that it once did.

Battles still rage around bases and these remain

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Big robots are always a winner
- ✓ Teamwork is unsurpassed
- ✓ Still nothing quite like it
- ✗ *Core Combat* is still abysmal
- ✗ War is futile, especially so in *PlanetSide*

70

Big up top, but not much down below

In the sky, there is only one rule: hunt or be hunted.
Ace Combat:™ Squadron Leader.



namco

www.acecombatgame.com

**FUN,
ANYONE?**
PlayStation 2

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- Constantine
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Official Xbox Magazine

EDEN ECLIPSE + 2.01 UPDATE PATCH

ON THE DVD SIZE 292MB REQUIRES Full version of UT2004
www.edeneclipse.com

TOTAL CONVERSION

**There's something going on in Eden...
Tony Lamb has words with the gardener**

IN CREATING *Eden Eclipse* as a free mod/demo, the Renegade Gods development team is looking to drum up interest for what it plans to be a fully-fledged game of the same name, and it would certainly be good to see it get there. Although it didn't make it into the grand final of 2004's Make Something Unreal competition, *Eden Eclipse* did come very close, and with a bit more polish it could well have done better.

This mod bucks the cigar-chewing, muscle-flexing hero norm by casting a female soldier as the heroine. She's a no-nonsense kinda gal called Amber Daniels, and it's your job to see her through a series of increasingly dangerous

adventures. The various environments are pretty hostile, and so too are the progressively larger and hungrier creatures she encounters, each one wanting to make her and her crew into a hearty main course.

As a game, *Eden Eclipse* faces some tough competition. Sci-fi environments, aggressive beasts and weapons straight out of FPS school don't grab the attention the way they used to, but it's early days and the maps created so far show a flair for level design (multiplayer would be a blast), and the various enemies certainly do manage to make the unwary player jump. It needs work, yes, but it shows a lot of promise too.



Never mind the gun, where's the can of Raid?

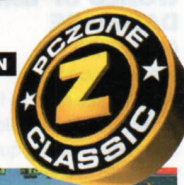
PCZONE VERDICT **73**
Coming along nicely



FORGOTTEN HOPE

SIZE 1.7GB REQUIRES Full version of Battlefield 1942
forgottenhope.bf1942files.com

TOTAL CONVERSION



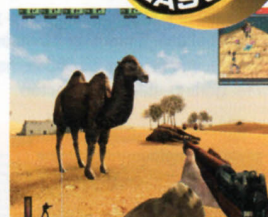
Is bigger really better? It is here, says Tony Lamb

THIS IS A big mod. Roll a supertanker, the new Airbus and that fat lass from *Pop Idol* into one and you'll have some idea. Focusing mainly on the early years of World War II when Europe seemed lost, the French had caved in and the Americans were still wondering where Europe was, *Forgotten Hope* is so damned good that few adjectives seem to fit the bill.

Its backbone is the huge array of armaments it comes packed with – adding over 200 new pieces of kit including tanks, half-tracks, aircraft, aircraft carriers, battleships and a plethora of personal weapons. Also included are the French, Italian and

Polish armed forces for those keen individuals who fancy a touch more history in their late-night *Battlefield* sessions.

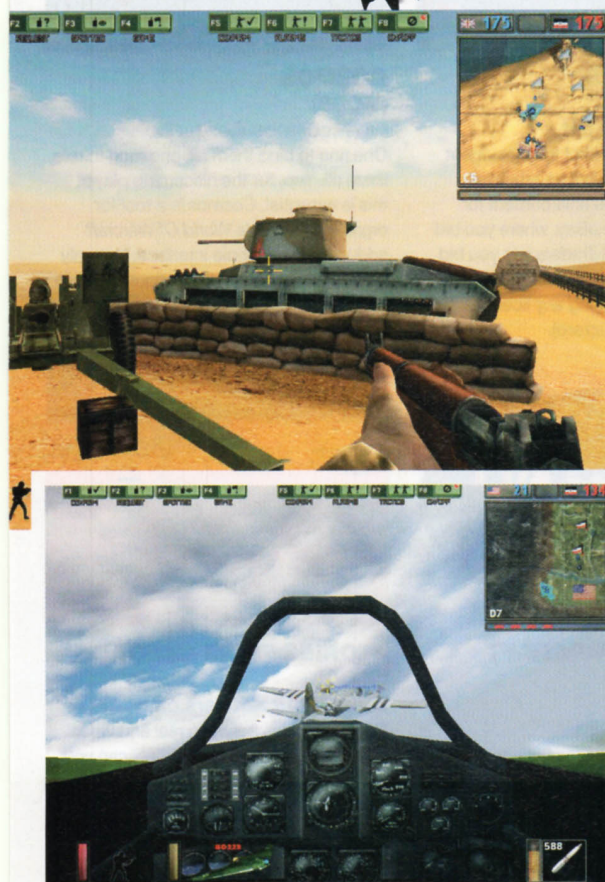
However, *Forgotten Hope* isn't just about adding reams of new goodies. A lot of thought has gone into the way it plays, too. The new maps are brilliant, as well as historically accurate, and the skins and sounds are pretty great too. The new 'pilot' class is now the only one with a parachute. Infantry classes have been tweaked to improve gameplay and heavy machine guns can be deployed to create



No, you can't ride it.

tough defensive positions. What's more, tank battle fans will enjoy the zoned armour that now makes flanking manoeuvres worthwhile – and if you like aircraft you won't be disappointed either, since it's not lacking in planes. This is a fantastic mod – involving, well executed and very entertaining.

PCZONE VERDICT **92**
A must-have



All-new aircraft to blow up.



COMMUNITY CHEST



WORLD OF WARCRAFT

Everything you always wanted to know about World Of Warcraft but were afraid to ask? Daniel Emery tells you where to go...

Whether you're solving quests, fighting monsters, gathering resources or manufacturing items – there's a lot going on in *World Of Warcraft*. Be careful when installing WOW utilities, though. There are a number of webpages posing as mods, that on closer inspection are nothing more than tools designed to collect your login information. No WOW UIMOD or related app should ever be required to run, or stay running, while you log into the game. If in doubt, leave well alone. The ones featured below, however, are fine...



| | | |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> View Brackets of Holy Wrath Archaic Plate of the Ancients Grand Legions of the Cosmos Peerless Shoulders of the Cosmos Impenetrable Leggings of the Cosmos Wanderer's Gloves of Healing Bronzebeard's Jerkin of the Cosmos Guard Ring of Stalking High Councilor's Boots of the Cosmos Lord's Girdle of Healing Vile Shoulders of Frozen | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cloth Wrist Cloth Shoulder Leather Leg Leather Shoulder Mail Leg Cloth Chest Cloth Feet Cloth Shoulder | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> +7 Holy Spell - damage +17 Arcane Spell - damage 136 Armor 110 Armor 262 Armor 90 armor +24 Airline Spell - damage 54 Armor 154 Armor +10 Frost Spell - damage |
|--|---|---|

WORLD OF WARCRAFT DATABASE (WEBSITE)

wow-db.com
Whether you need to find out where the old key you found belongs, are trying to solve a maddening quest or fancy adding a few frills to your interface, this is your first port of call. It has over 40 different add-ons, info on over 20,000 items and a sweet getting-started guide, too.



WORLD OF WARCRAFT CATACOMBS (WEBSITE)

wow.catacombs.com
Although this site still has some 'design issues', it does have a reasonable creature database, a nifty guide on trade skills and an excellent discussion forum. There's also a map database, although as we went to press there were still a fair few gaps in the set.

Twisted Chanter's Staff (Blue)

(2 Hand Weapons - Staves auction)

Time left: 5 hours 53 min
Started: Jan 10, 2005 19:10
Closes: Jan 17, 2005 19:10
Quick links:
• View comments
• View bids

Server: PvE/Europe Beta
Seller: Goldenpeak (Buddy Trader)
Bids: 2

Item description
See image

Twisted Chanter's Staff
Binds when equipped
Two-Hand
55 - 84 Damage
(20.4 damage per second)
+5 Stamina
+10 Intellect

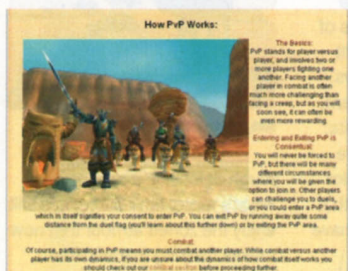
RPG TRADERS (MARKET)

www.rpgtraders.net
No, it's not some kind of Iraqi insurgent bring-and-buy sale, but an attempt to create an eBay-style environment for WOW items. Unlike eBay, where you bid with real cash, RPG Traders lets you bid for items using WOW's internal currency (and thus not breaching any licence agreements with Blizzard).



COSMOS (MODS)

www.cosmosui.org
One ring to bind them all, one mod to rule them all. Yup, for the discerning player, this is essential. Cosmos is a tool for organising multiple *World Of Warcraft* add-ons into a simple interface. Not only will it let you manage the various in-game mods, but it also allows you to develop your own functions.



WOW WARCRY (WEBSITE)

wow.warcry.com
Another *WOW* resource site, with the usual collection of maps, forums and mods. But what sets this one apart is the excellent Player vs Player walkthrough/FAQ. If you've not played on a PvP server before, you had better read this guide – otherwise you're going to get 'owned' very, very fast. You have been warned...



ALLAKHAZAM (MAPS)

www.allakhazam.com
Let's be honest, MMOGs aren't big – they're bloody enormous. It can take hours just getting from A to B, let alone remembering the way. So you're going to need a map. Lots of maps. Luckily, this site's got more maps than National Geographic – from newbie zones through to bastard-hard guild raid-only zones.



WORLD OF WARCRAFT RADIO (ADD-ON)

www.wcradio.com
A bunch of *WOW* players have teamed up and put their DJing skills to good use, creating a dedicated radio station with a combination of music, game info and banter. It currently broadcasts during US peak times (12am-5am GMT), but there are rumours it will expand now Europe is live.



STORIES FROM ABROAD (BLOG)

stories.warcraftwars.com
The boundaries between real and virtual life are forever blurring. Not only can you trade pretend items for real-life currency these days, but the ultimate in nerd culture has now made the leap. SFA is the world's first MMOG Blog, recounting one man's travels and experiences in the world of Azeroth.

STEVE HILL'S NEVERQUEST

Steve Hill becomes a cross-dressing dwarf in *World Of Warcraft*. Sigh...

PERHAPS wary that I approach these monthly sojourns into the realms of the great unwashed with increasing despair, the *ZONE* minions do seem to be going out of their way to ease my passage. Like a faithful roadie to my temperamental lead singer, Prezzer hasn't quite turned it up to eleven, but he has furnished me with a level eight Dwarf Hunter. By the way, that's a dwarf who hunts, as opposed to someone who hunts dwarfs. You can't get away with that sort of thing – not any more.

What I'm lacking in height, I make up for in facial topiary, sporting a handsome ginger moustache and a plaited beard that hangs down to my ball sack. As well as my long-range hunting skills, I'm also a novice chef, as Prezzer casually

informs me in the latest of an increasingly bizarre series of emails.

COME ON IN
Not only have I been fluffed to perfection, but there's also a welcoming party awaiting my arrival in the wonderful and terrifying *World Of Warcraft*. It may only be angry art drone Jamie (aka JimLad), but you can't underestimate the benefit of a friendly face in the harsh unknown. That said, by way of greeting, JimLad bends over and loudly farts in my general direction. Charmed, I'm sure. Introductions over, he offers me a gift, with the kindly invitation: "Here, put this on."

Unquestioningly accepting his generosity, I slip on the garment and give everyone a twirl, letting them take a good

look at the ankle-length frilly dress that I'm now sporting. Wankers. I can almost hear them laughing from here, although I'm not sure what's more disturbing – the fact that I'm wearing it or that JimLad has actually woven it by hand using his burgeoning dressmaking skills.

Dressed and ready for some adventuring, I follow JimLad through what appears to be a real-ale fan's wet dream. In classic *NeverQuest* fashion, I immediately manage to fall into the canal, not ideal for a four-foot dwarf. Clambering back on to dry land and wringing my beard out, JimLad suggests that we get a taxi.

Now I'm not expecting a black cab to pull up, but this is something else. Arriving at the cab rank, I select my destination whereupon I mount a giant bird and take to the sky. Soaring above hill and dale with JimLad in tow, it's an exhilarating ride.

"I'm on a bird!" I gleefully shout out.

"And you're a dwarf in a dress," reminds JimLad.

Having been brought down to earth metaphorically, the big bird does the same literally, dropping me in the frozen

winter wonderland of Frostmane Hold. It seems I have business with some headhunter trolls, namely the assassination of them. If I'm going to kill trolls, I'll need some

"I'm on a bird!" I gleefully shout. 'And you're a dwarf in a dress' JimLad reminds me"

practice. Trying out my hunting skills, I easily pick off a few rabbits with my musket, progressing to crag boars and ragged young wolves, with even the odd juvenile snow leopard thrown in for good measure. Clearly, the anti-hunting bill has yet to reach Dun Morogh, and the slaughter continues unchecked.

BEAR NECESSITIES

With the bloodlust rising, I scream "let's kill a bear!" and wade into one nearby with an axe. This is a mistake, and I receive a fatal mauling from the woodland beast. Reappearing in spirit form at a nearby graveyard, returning to the land of the living is a simple matter of finding my corpse, face down in the snow. Note to self: steer clear of bears.

We've now been joined by Prezzer, who advises "there's a cave near here with bad things in it", before leading a raid on the hapless trolls. Joined by the foxy Khyrstel, we wade in

en masse, bathing in the fresh blood of the vanquished troglodytes. They put up a bit of a fight, but essentially it's genocide, and we mercilessly butcher them for the sake of a few coppers.

HIP PRIEST

With the *ZONE* slaves drifting back to work, I'm left to my own devices. A sinister German called Sternenlicht starts following me and eventually says "hi".

"Do you like my dress?" I coquettishly ask him. "A man made it for me."

"It's a bit strange," says the swarthy Bavarian.

"What, a dwarf in a dress?" I reply. "You know you love it."

He evidently does, as he takes it upon himself to show me round, even helping out with some quests. It doesn't work out though – I'm a dwarf, he's a priest – and we feel ourselves drifting apart. Eventually, I tell him that I have business down south and walk out of his life forever.

Back in the frozen woodlands, I slaughter a few more defenceless beasts, light a fire and put my cooking skills to the test, rustling up a passable portion of roasted boar. Solitude and meat. Bliss. **[X]**



Hill rustles up tonight's meal.

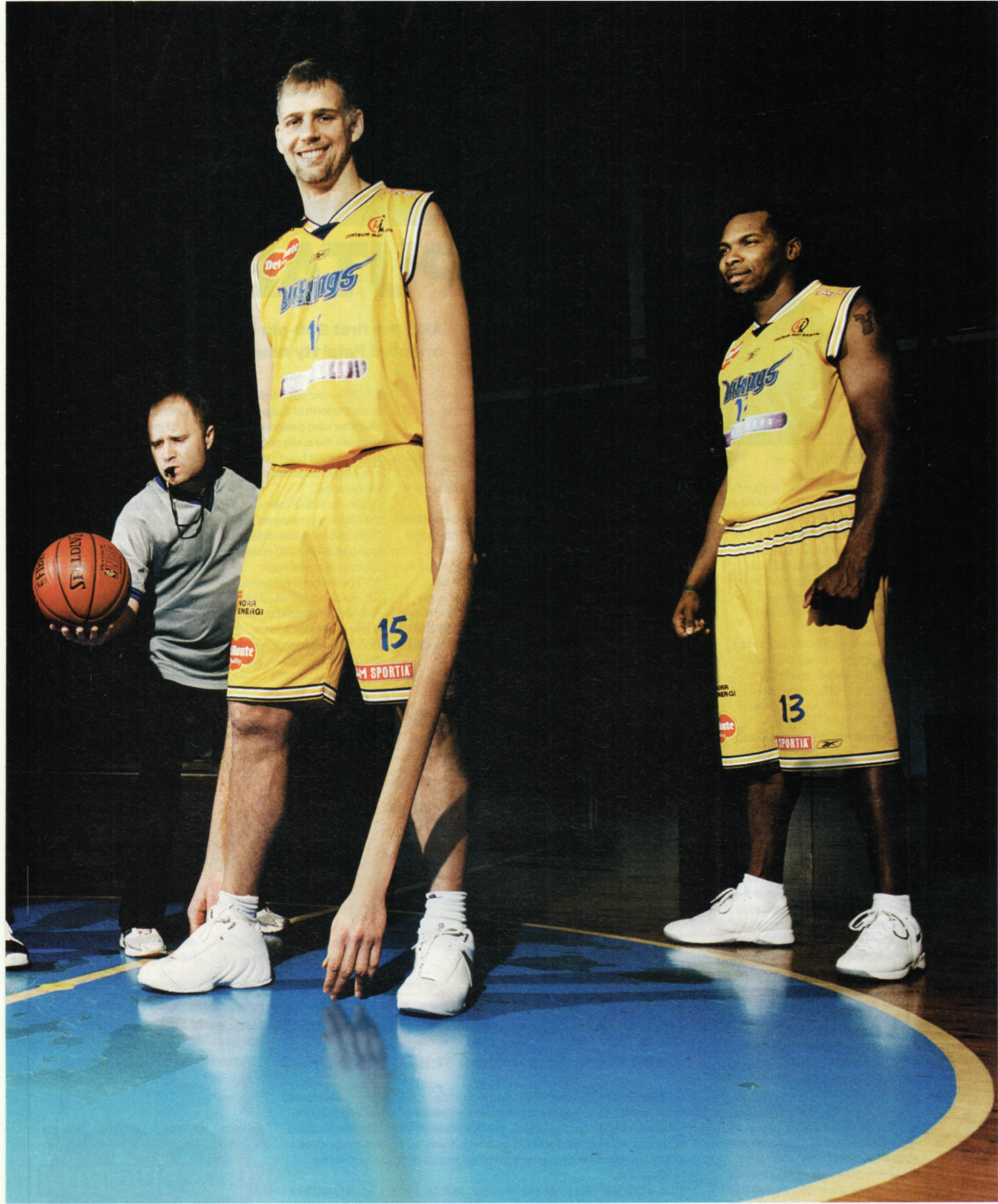


Not the best armour.



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MEET THEM AND BEAT THEM

HARDWARE

ALL THE LATEST NEWS AND REVIEWS FROM THE WORLD OF PC HARDWARE

ONE-MAN BRAND



■ **HARDWARE EDITOR** Phil Wand

▲ Aside from being American and unable to spell his name correctly, Johnathan 'Wendy' Wendell has made a lot of money from clicking his mouse in *Quake III*. "And what are you doing these days?" ask people at family gatherings. "I'm a marine and I'm into sports," he replies, adopting his trademark snarl and immediately giving the game away.

More recently, Wendy has been making money clicking his mouse at people in *Doom 3*, and has been putting his 'Fatal1ty' brand to a range of fancy PC hardware. Again, he's been failing to look hard.

How much ABIT is paying him to use his corny name we'll never know, but it's obvious he's getting a little more out of the deal than an MX440 and a copy of *Redneck Rampage*. For a clue, his three-year contract with the Razer mouse people was rumoured to be worth \$200,000 – no wonder he can't do menacing, he's too busy laughing.

Faced with such numbers, I've decided to create a gaming persona myself and launch my own brand of products. I've opted for 'Reap3r', a nickname that, as with 'Fatal1ty', has been adopted by around eight trillion unimaginative bell-ends across the globe since the dawn of multiplayer gaming. This is a clever strategy to strike fear into the hearts of my opponents – unimaginative bell-ends are just the kind of people to waste their study leave getting good at FPSs and developing an immunity to caffeine.

Only trouble is, I'm shit at *Quake* and *Doom 3*, so I'd spend important matches falling into holes, asking where the health is and complaining about packet loss. Mind you, that would introduce a whole new level of realism to CPL tournaments and may even win me the game. Think about it. As Fatal1ty is tapping out his response to my one-liner about his mum, I'd sneak up behind him, railgun the bastard in the arse and quit, claiming my girlfriend's just arrived. You're only as good as your last frag, after all...

INDISPUTABLY FATAL

AN8 the first 939-pin board in ABIT's gamer-oriented Fatal1ty range. SLI versions to follow...

WITH THE same attention-getting looks and gamer-friendly tricks as its Intel counterpart (see AA8XE review, page 123), the ABIT Fatal1ty AN8 looks to be one of the year's most important boards if you're an Athlon fan.

At its core, the nForce4 Ultra chipset provides support for all 939-pin AMD 64 and 64 FX processors, with up to 4GB RAM in the form of PC3200, PC2700 or PC2100 memory. There's also Gigabit Ethernet onboard, NVIDIA Firewall and ABIT AudioMAX 5.1 with optical

S/PDIF in and out. AudioMAX takes the form of a separate daughter card designed to separate the audio connectors from the main board, thus reducing the likelihood of interference.

Like its 925XE-based sibling, the AN8 has no support for ATA RAID, but there is an integrated four-port SATA RAID controller capable of sustaining a 3GB-per-second data rate. Otherwise known as SATA II or SATA 3G, this huge bandwidth is one of nForce4's more digressive features, since even the fastest hard drives aren't

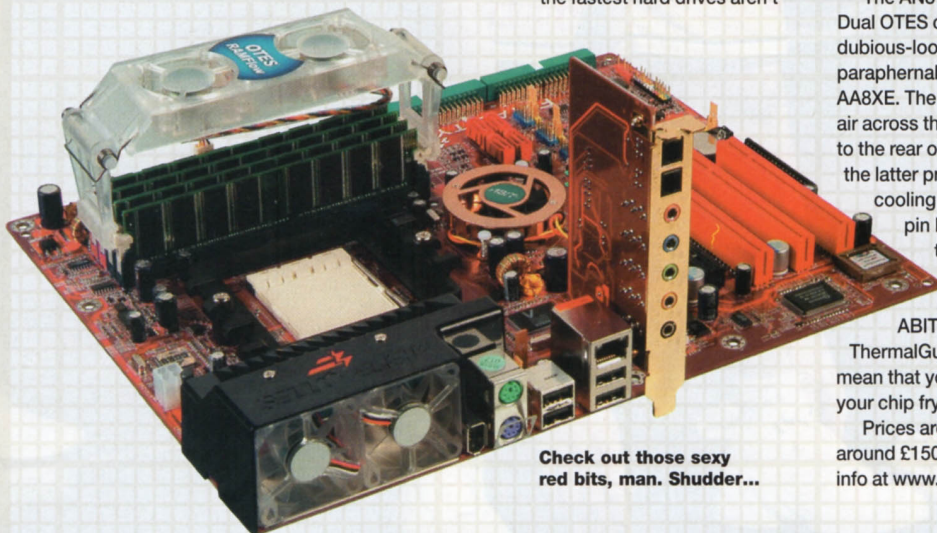
capable of delivering much more than 150MB-per-second.

Of greater interest is the AN8's wide array of overclocking features. Most prominent of these is the Windows-based µGuru Technology, which integrates OC Guru overclocking, ABIT EQ hardware monitoring, FlashMenu one-click BIOS updates and BlackBox diagnostics in a single application you can fire up from your desktop. There's no simpler way to muck about with your motherboard.

The AN8 also uses the Dual OTES cooling ducts and dubious-looking RAMFlow paraphernalia seen on the AA8XE. The former channels air across the motherboard to the rear of the case, and the latter provides top-down cooling for up to four 184-pin DIMMs. Reports are that it's a little clumsy, but together with

ABIT's own CPU ThermalGuard feature, it does mean that you should keep your chip frying in the kitchen.

Prices are expected to be around £150. Check out more info at www.abit.com.tw



Check out those sexy red bits, man. Shudder...

100% GERM-FREE

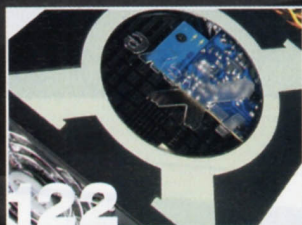
NOD32 receives its 30th Virus Bulletin award

THE WILDLIST Organisation collects virus reports from experts around the world, compiling the data into a definitive list which is used to show which viruses are most active. The Virus Bulletin 100% award is awarded to any anti-virus products which detects these during both on-demand and on-access scanning, and which generates no false positives for clean files.

PC ZONE's favourite anti-virus tool, NOD32, remains the only product in the world that has not missed any WildList virus in Virus Bulletin's tests. "With its usual admirable performance, NOD32 once again leaves little room for comment and achieves its latest VB 100% award with predictable ease," say the Virus Bulletin team in its February edition.

Eset, NOD32's developer, now has its record 30th Virus Bulletin 100% Award. Big name products such as AVG, Kaspersky, Sophos Anti-Virus, McAfee VirusScan, F-Secure and F-Prot all failed to make the grade.





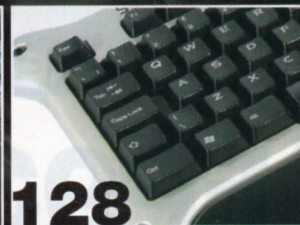
REVIEWS
The shape of things to come



DEAR WANDY
Computer says no?



WATCHDOG
Schmucks sorted



BUYER'S GUIDE
Retail therapy here



The Aurora 7500 SLI starts at £1,799 and finishes some way off.

DOUBLE BILL

Hurray! Alienware releases AMD64-based games rig with twin GPU capabilities. Boo! They're a bit pricey...

WITH ITS nForce4 PCI-Express motherboard and option of two NVIDIA cards, Alienware claims the new Aurora 7500 SLI makes it the first system manufacturer to offer dual-GPU technology.

"The introduction of SLI demonstrates that, for those computer users who demand and require the highest performance computing solutions, Alienware will continue to be the first manufacturer to bring cutting-edge performance to the market," says Stefan Konopatzki, VP of sales and marketing at Alienware. "The Aurora 7500 SLI combines SLI technology with the power of AMD 64-bit processors to provide the highest performance available for even the most demanding applications and games."

Prices for the Aurora 7500 SLI range start at £1,799, but buyers should note this is for the entry-level AMD64 3500+ system with a single 128MB GeForce 6600GT card, 512MB RAM and no monitor. If you reconfigure your Aurora with FX55 processor, dual 6800 Ultra

cards, 1GB low-latency RAM and 17-inch flat screen, the price whooshes towards a sphincter-clenching £3,500. But if you have this kind of money to blow on a dream gaming machine, the Aurora 7500 SLI has very little in the way of competition. Certainly nothing comes close for build quality, backup or LAN party kudos – www.alienware.co.uk.

HARD CORE

Reports suggest Intel is likely to release its dual-core processors much earlier than expected...

SOME TIME ago we reported that Intel had canned plans to hike the speed of its chips beyond 4GHz, and would instead concentrate on developing a new dual-core design. The theory goes that two individual processing engines, Prescott-based and with their own 1MB cache memory, will be able to deal with more information at any given moment, thus making the turnaround of data significantly faster than before. Every application, from Windows Media Encoder to *Half-Life 2*, should enjoy some very noticeable speed improvements.

Intel's earlier roadmaps suggested an autumn release for these new processors, codenamed Smithfield and likely to be branded Pentium 800-series. However, more recent reports hint at an early summer arrival to beat AMD and to coincide with i945 and i955X. This pair of new chipsets bring support for DDR2 667MHz and should help Intel muscle its way back into the enthusiast market.

Unlike AMD, whose plans involve releasing dual-core upgrades of existing products, Intel's approach means it's unlikely you'll be able to drop the new CPUs onto existing motherboards. The only thing not yet clear is whether Intel will allow desktop products to retain Hyper-Threading capabilities, allowing two processing threads per core and giving four in total.

Two chips, four processors. Both Intel and AMD are going dual-core, but the Pentium looks likely to arrive first.



SNIPPETS

A CASE OF ASUS

Despite three unattractive UV-coated colours and a £105 price tag, we reckon the new ASUS VENTO 3600 will be a sure-fire hit. In addition to a peculiar 'hipped' shape giving the impression it was sat upon while hot, the VENTO includes a number of enthusiast features such as a swivel side door, a sliding front panel and specially designed interior and side vents for maximum airflow. The case supports four 5.25-inch, four 3.5-inch drives, six PCI and one AGP slots, four USB ports and two audio ports. www.asus.com



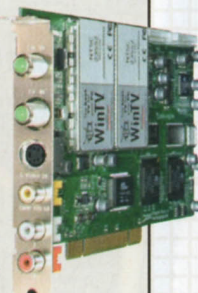
COOLER POWER

CoolerMaster's new BTX-ready Real Power PSU, the RS-450, includes an analogue power monitor for the front panel of your case and an intelligent fan speed control to keep it hushed until juice is needed. The 450W RS includes support for the latest ATX 2.0 specification with a 24-pin board connector (an adaptor is supplied for older 20-pin boards), 12V ATX connector plus two SATA connectors, seven HDD and two floppy connectors. It also features a dedicated line for your graphics card. www.coolermaster-europe.com



DOUBLE VISION

Hauppauge Digital's WinTV PVR-500 card integrates a stereo FM receiver with two TV tuners, each with a hardware MPEG encoder and NICAM stereo decoder – this means you can watch one channel while recording another, record two channels at once or pause and rewind live broadcasts. You can also archive all recorded content to DVDs. The PVR-500 includes composite and S-Video inputs plus stereo line-in and is supplied with certified WHQL drivers. It'll set you back £150. www.hauppauge.co.uk



DRIVER WATCH



Need a patch? Take a look to see if you're behind the times

MOTHERBOARD

| MANUFACTURER | NAME | DESC | RELEASED | SIZE | WEB |
|--------------|---------------------|------------|-----------|--------|---|
| Intel | INF Update Utility | 6.0.1.1007 | 16-Dec-04 | 1.5MB | support.intel.com NEW |
| NVIDIA | Forceware | 5.10 | 17-Sep-04 | 26.8MB | nvidia.com |
| NVIDIA | nForce4 Standalone | 6.39 | 04-Feb-05 | 32MB | nvidia.com NEW |
| VIA | Hyperion Pro 64-bit | 0.99 Beta | 06-Aug-04 | 2.7MB | viaarena.com |

GRAPHICS

| MANUFACTURER | NAME | DESC | RELEASED | SIZE | WEB |
|--------------|-----------------------------|--------------|-----------|--------|---|
| ATI | Display, Control Panel, WDM | CATALYST 5.1 | 17-Jan-05 | 22.8MB | ati.com NEW |
| NVIDIA | Forceware | 66.93 | 09-Nov-04 | 17.8MB | nvidia.com |

SOUND

| MANUFACTURER | NAME | DESC | RELEASED | SIZE | WEB |
|--------------|------------------------------|---------|-----------|---------|--|
| Creative | Creative Audigy 4 Pro Update | 3.00.55 | 20-Dec-04 | 20.95MB | uk.europe.creative.com |
| M-Audio | Revolution | 1.0.2.8 | 13-Feb-04 | 10.16MB | m-audio.com |

FP931

FLAT PANEL

■ £246 | Manufacturer: BenQ |

Phone: 01442 301000 | www.benq.co.uk

Plenty of inches and a few milliseconds for sub-£250

SPECIFICATIONS

| | |
|-------------|-------------|
| Screen size | 19-inches |
| Resolution | 1280x1024 |
| Response | 16ms |
| Contrast | 450:1 |
| Brightness | 250cd/sq.m. |
| View angle | H130, V130 |
| Weight | 7.4kg |
| Connections | D-Sub |

BENQ'S FP931

is one of the least expensive 19-inch flat screens on the market, and certainly the cheapest screen with a rated 16ms response time. Granted, that's no indication of suitability for gaming, with some 25ms screens delivering better images than far quicker rivals, but the BenQ is capable of painting fast-moving pictures that are as good as the specifications suggest.

However, it's clear where the pennies have been saved. There's no DVI connector, no height adjust and if you compare the BenQ alongside a ViewSonic, you notice its slightly frumpy looks and lower grade

plastics. If the BenQ wore spectacles, they'd be two inches thick and provided by the NHS.

But hey, the price. For just £250 you get a tilting flat screen that's good at dealing with contrasted images, despite a number of snotty Web reviews to the contrary, and one that's just fine with darker tones, such as when poking around the nooks and crannies of *Doom 3*.

As already mentioned, the 16ms response time seems a genuine approximation of the unit's fitness for gaming – nothing I did could provoke any obvious blurring. OK, so the results are not as rich nor as vibrant as those on an equivalent LG, but as long as you don't work in a bank and are not sat next to someone who has an LG on their desk, you'd never know.

The only thing you need to be aware of is the FP931's interpolation results – in simpler terms, how the screen deals with resizing images and games that don't match its 1280x1024

native size. Sadly, this is the one area where the BenQ really falls short, with 1024x768 and 800x600 output looking really scrappy. So if you're thinking about buying the FP, use the money you save to upgrade your graphics card.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ One of the cheapest 19-inch screens
- ✓ Good image quality
- ✗ No DVI connector
- ✗ Poor interpolation

80

Despite the drawbacks, the low price means you won't go wrong



VP171S

■ £299 | Manufacturer: ViewSonic

Phone: 01293 643900 | www.viewsonic.co.uk

Everything you'd want from a gaming flat screen

FLAT PANEL

YOU PAYS your money and takes your choice. The ViewSonic is a 17-inch product for 19-inch money. However, it's also one of the first screens to be rated with a single-digit response time and with height adjust, swivel base and DVI input, it's the consummate choice for games players. Contrast and brightness are exceptional, and the sci-fi colours seen in games such as *Tribes: Vengeance* and *UT2004* are both bright and vivid – with adjustments in the on-screen menus, they can be made to appear even more intense and, well, fun.

As with other screens in ViewSonic's Pro range, the VP171s has an ultra-slim bezel, making it ideal for dual-screen set-ups, and boasts a full-

featured pivot feature, enabling you to rotate the glass from portrait to landscape. Not really a selling point for gamers, but if you enjoy showing off to friends at LAN events, it's an attention-grabbing party trick.

As for the fabled 8ms response time, well, it's not like the screen is obviously superior to any of its slower siblings. Quite frankly, if you managed to notice any blur on a 16ms ViewSonic, you're either imagining it, on amyl nitrate, or both. One thing the 8ms rating does do is draw more people into buying LCDs, and with increased demand we can only expect more products from a larger number of manufacturers and hopefully better prices.

Were there any downsides? Yes, a few. As with every other ViewSonic screen I've tested,

SPECIFICATIONS

| | |
|-------------|-------------|
| Screen size | 17-inches |
| Resolution | 1280x1024 |
| Response | 8ms |
| Contrast | 500:1 |
| Brightness | 300cd/sq.m. |
| View angle | H140, V130 |
| Weight | 6.5kg |
| Connections | DVI, D-Sub |

the buttons are an ergonomic nightmare, being too small, too fiddly and lacking any tactile feedback when you press them. Additionally, there were a few odd moments with the on-screen display – a number of times the VP171s was used, the menus came up blank, requiring the monitor to be power cycled. How do you fix bugs in the onboard software? You don't!

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Even the packaging is top quality
- ✓ Plenty of features
- ✓ Built for films and games
- ✗ Expensive for a 17-inch

90

A master gamer

FATAL1TY AA8XE

■ £160 | Manufacturer: ABIT Computer |
Phone: 01438 228888 | www.abit.com.tw

Johnathan Wendell has a lot to answer for. Crying gamers and this motherboard for a start...

MOTHERBOARD

ABIT'S FATAL1TY

AA8XE is a Socket 775 board packed to the gunwales with demon tweaks – as well as overclocker-friendly tricks, including an unlocked CPU multiplier, the Fatal1ty has LED backlights that bathe your case in an angry red glow. Even the box it comes in, a weighty black affair with the words 'Built To Kill' plastered across it, manages to be both alluring and unnerving at the same time. You half expect to pull out a Beretta and cartridges rather than a motherboard and cables. But no – thankfully, what's inside was what we expected.

Once installed, the most striking feature of the AA8XE is its crimson colour and array of

exhaust fans – two in a chunky housing at the rear, plus two more over your memory to keep your RAM fresh. Just as impressive is the BIOS. All the OC Guru settings, voltage settings, fan settings and a lot more besides are described in detail in the manual in no less than 14 pages. This may sound intimidating, but it's actually rather seductive.

Although the AA8XE makes an almost flawless gaming platform, its Pentium roots means it's no match for the AMD64. If you're looking to buy a Fatal1ty, and it's certainly a brand to look out for, wait for the nForce4 variant due shortly. See the news on p120 for more.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Both style and substance
- ✓ Overclocking wet dream
- ✗ No ATA RAID support
- ✗ You really want an FX

81

Plenty of wow, but wait for the nForce4

PC GAMING KEYBOARD

■ £39 | Saitek | Phone: 01454 451900 | www.saitek.com/uk

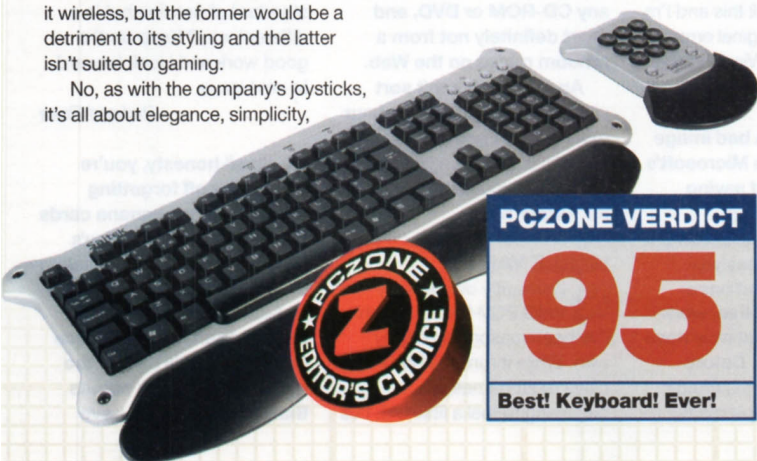
Let your fingers do the talking...

KEYBOARD

ONCE AGAIN, Saitek has designed and produced a peripheral whose quality well exceeds its price tag. It looks so beautifully designed, feels so well engineered and sounds so quiet in operation that it's hard to imagine how another manufacturer – or even Saitek itself – could improve upon it. You could add more multimedia hotkeys or make it wireless, but the former would be a detriment to its styling and the latter isn't suited to gaming.

No, as with the company's joysticks, it's all about elegance, simplicity,

build quality and adaptability – something to suit everyone. Take the command pad. It's fully programmable and because it's separate from everything else, you can unplug it and move it to suit both righties and lefties. And if you don't need it, you can simply unplug it and put it back in the box. Wait, I almost forgot – both the main keyboard and command pad light up at night in a beguiling cobalt blue. Perfect.



PCZONE VERDICT

95

Best! Keyboard! Ever!

420W I-XEYE

■ £60 | Tagan | Phone: 0870 1620 818 | www.tagan.com

Want to have the power?

AS A BRAND, Tagan has shot from obscurity to overclocker superstardom in the blink of an eye. Mention electricity to eager gamers, and the I-XEYE already has the status to match PowerStream or TruePower – two stalwarts from more established names. The 420W unit features a clear window for funky illuminated internals and incorporates two fans, one to pull air from the case and the other to push it out the back. Cable-wise, the I-XEYE includes a 20-pin board connector plus

Tagan's clever four-pin slide attachment for BTX and later ATX applications. There's also two SATA plugs, eight HDD and two floppy connectors, a shielded VGA power connector fed direct from the supply, two P4 motherboard wires and a grounding hoop. The box remains remarkably quiet even under heavy load, and the manual is well laid out and informative without being jargonised or confusing. The I-XEYE comes with a three-year warranty and as you've probably guessed, is highly recommended too.



PCZONE VERDICT

91

Solid, adaptable, quiet



DEAR WANDY

Once again it's time for your monthly dose of Wandy's patented Medicinal Compound, refreshing the peripherals other magazines simply cannot reach...

■ MEDICAL MAN Phil Wand

LET IT ALL OUT

Share your techie or gaming-related problems with us and in turn, we may well share them with thousands of readers via these very pages in a big communal love-in type thing. If you have any **top tips** to share with the group, then send them in too: if Wandy's impressed, he'll print them and send you £50 for your trouble.

Write to Dear Wandy, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP.

Email Address your letters to us at wandy@dearwandy.com with the subject heading 'Dear Wandy'. Please note: while we can assure you that we read absolutely every techie query sent to us, we're unable to offer personal replies. Sorry.

CHEAP GT

Q I'm after a new graphics card, so looked in your Buyer's Guide section and thought the 128MB Sparkle GeForce 6600GT was a good idea at £139. However, while browsing the Web I found a GIGABYTE 6600GT with 256MB onboard for just £98 including delivery at dabs.com.

Have I got the cards mixed up, or is this a genuine bargain buy? If the latter, I'm sure all the readers would like to know!

Simon Jones

A The GeForce 6600GT is an excellent choice, but I'd be very surprised if you could find a 128MB card for less than £100, let alone the bigger 256MB variant for the same money. My guess is that you've seen one of the plain, non-GT 6600s, because their 256MB models are around the £95 mark. While it's also possible that dear old dabs.com had its prices in a twist and you were looking at a genuine web bargain, online retailers have become wise to price goofs. These days, they include a clause in their terms and conditions allowing them to describe anything you checkout as an 'offer' rather than a 'contract'. This

means that, until the goods leave their warehouse, companies can write to you at any time they choose and withdraw the 'offer' in the event the price is wrong. That may sound unfair, but if an online retailer is forced to honour every wrong price it has on its site, it'd be possible to bankrupt them in just a few hours – as was almost the case with Argos a few years back.

MENTAL IMAGE

Q I'm trying to upgrade from DirectX 9.0b to 9.0c. However, whenever I install it, it stops at d3d9.dll file and I get the error message, 'DirectX did not copy a required file'. I ran the DirectX Diagnostic Tool (dxdiag.exe) and got the following, 'dxdiag.exe – Bad Image. The application or DLL C:\Windows\system32\d3d9.dll is not a valid Windows image'.

I then used the DirectX eradicator from Guru3d and it restored DX 8.1, but 9.0c still didn't want to install. I then performed a System Restore and tried dxdiag again. This time there were no problems detected and it said all files were fine. However, 9.0c still didn't want to play ball.

Getting desperate, I tried to install Windows Service Pack 2 but it throws up the following error, 'Setup cannot copy the file dxdiag.dll'. All this and I'm still getting the original error too. I'm running Windows XP.

Paul Regan

A A bad image is Microsoft's way of saying that the file is screwed and won't work unless you replace it. And once you understand that, work backwards to what may have caused this error. Before doing anything else, check your HDD for problems by

running Microsoft Scandisk – right click your C drive icon, choose Properties, click the Tools tab and press the Check Now button at the top, making sure that both checkboxes have ticks in them (this makes Scandisk perform its most thorough mode). Once the tests are done and you've rebooted – and assuming any problems have been fixed – delete the d3d9.dll from the Windows\system32 folder. Then, as dxdiag.dll has been causing you problems, remove that.

Now run your virus checker on the drive. In the unlikely event that you don't have a virus checker, or your

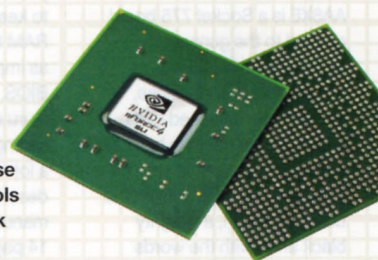
“Online retailers are now wise to price goofs and include a get-out clause”

virus definitions are out of date, there's not much point in continuing as it's likely your computer will be unusable in a few months anyway. If the scan comes back clean and green, deactivate your anti-virus temporarily while you install a full and proper, freshly downloaded copy of DirectX from the Microsoft.com downloads section. Not from any CD-ROM or DVD, and most definitely not from a random mirror on the Web.

And if that doesn't sort you out, I'd suggest that your machine has some more serious issues – write back or visit www.dearwandy.com for further help.

VIABLE VAIO

Q I currently own a Sony VAIO PCV-RX514 which I've been reasonably happy with. While it runs well and plays most games, it's beginning to feel a little old. I've



One of the good things about the 6600GT is that you can pair them up on nForce4 SLI boards.

upgraded the onboard RAM and feel confident about doing the video card next – but which one? I'm looking at staying with NVIDIA, though I wouldn't be bothered by a move to ATI. The only thing is, it'd have to be a mainstream model as I'm saving to build a whole new system around AMD64 and high-end graphics.

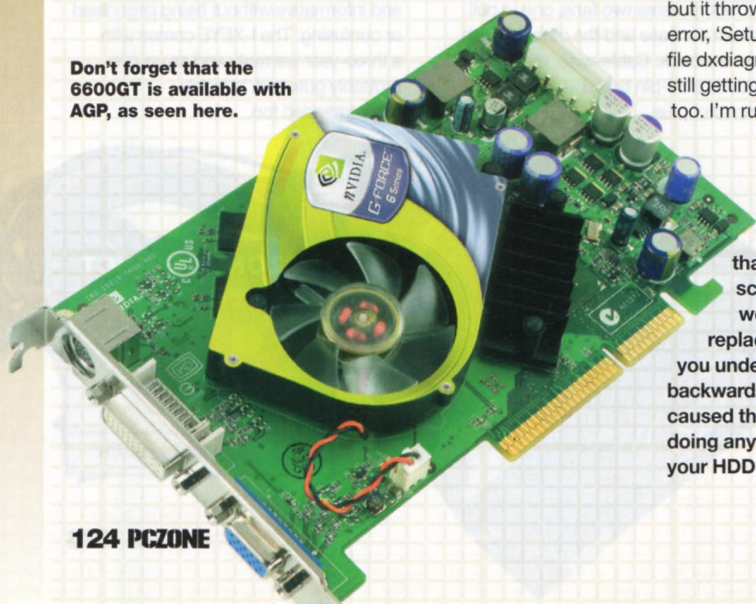
The two cards I like are the RADEON 9800 PRO and the NVIDIA FX5900 XT, both of which will suit my needs and tide me over until new PC time. What card would you advise me to get and why?

Additionally, I'm looking to get broadband with Wanadoo. If I buy a broadband modem, will I need to get a guy out to my house to sort a new phone hub or does it still use the standard phone line but in a different way? Keep up the good work and I look forward to next issue.

Richard Rose

A In all honesty, you're better off forgetting yesterday's top banana cards and getting one of today's mainstream models, which in most circumstances are just as fast. It's hard to believe, but a modern £135 GeForce or RADEON will deliver the kind of benchmark results that last year would have

Don't forget that the 6600GT is available with AGP, as seen here.



"This is a common problem that drives people insane – the drives power-up, the BIOS sees them, so why is Windows so blind?"

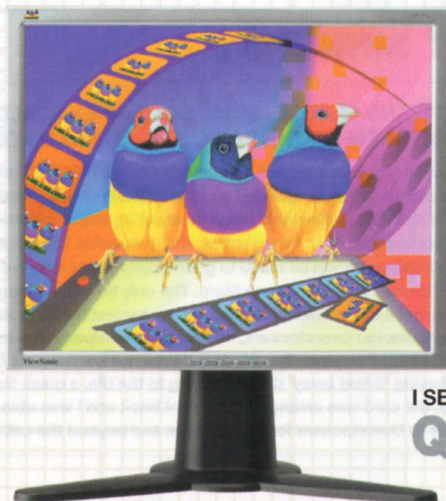
dropped people's jaws onto their space bars. If you shop around, you should be able to pick up a value-brand GeForce 6600GT for no more than £125 and a RADEON X700 PRO for around £130. Personally, I'd go with NVIDIA's GT, as if you buy an SLI motherboard later this year as part of your upgrade, you can pair it with another for some instant added oomph.

As for your Wanadoo question, no, you won't need a guy to come round and mess up your house. Broadband is basically another layer on what you already have. When you place your order, you'll be given an activation date, and on that day your phone line will magically become broadband-enabled. Plug in your modem and you'll be away. If you're dead set on getting your own gear and don't need Web space or new email accounts, shop around for a 'wires only' broadband package, as they tend to be cheaper.

FOR WHOM THE DELL TOLLS

Q You know those new Dell XPS systems you see on the TV that only cost around £1,100? Well, I saved up a few pennies and went to the Dell website. Thing is, with a Pentium 4 processor 540 (3.20GHz, 800FSB, 1MB cache), XP Home Edition, a keyboard and mouse, flat screen monitor, 256MB ATI Radeon X850XT Platinum Edition and 16x DVD+-RW drive, it actually cost £1,835...

When buying a flat panel monitor, make sure you go for one of the later 8ms response screens like the ViewSonic VP171S.



I was going to buy it until I read the Buyer's Guide section of PC ZONE and thought, hey, I could save a bunch of money if I built it myself. So what I'm after is a fast processor, flat screen monitor, a top of the line graphics card and decent-quality hardware to back it up. Can you help?

Andrew Tumelty

A This is a trick used by companies all around the globe, not just Dell. Car manufacturers do it, dropping the knifelike shape of their turbo GT into slick-looking adverts with a price that refers to the 1.1 hatchback model that your granny uses for runs to Sainsbury's. It's a way of hooking people in to the entire range, and while they're not breaking any laws doing it, it's slightly disingenuous.

Anyway, if we put that to one side for a moment, I don't think the Dell XPS is a very good product anyway and thus it's probably best that you've decided to go the homebrew route anyway. Since I have a good idea of your budget, the key components I'd go for would be the Athlon 64 4000+ processor (£420), A8N-SLI motherboard (£100), 1GB Crucial DDR PC3200 memory (£160) and XFX GeForce 6800GT 256MB (£320), for a total of exactly

£1,000. I'd then look around for one of the new 8ms flat panels from the likes of BenQ and ViewSonic – expect to pay somewhere between £250 and £290.

SATA INSANE

Q I've been happily building my own PCs now for a few years, upgrading and so on as is necessary. I've had no problems – or none that didn't resolve themselves after a bit of searching or a bit of luck.

However, I've recently purchased an ASUS A7N8X-E Deluxe motherboard. I've had no problems with the board and new processor, until I came to buying two 80GB Hitachi hard drives. These are SATA and the old drive was IDE.

Windows is now telling me that no HDD is detected when I try and install to the new drive – I'm sure I need to load drivers, but the ASUS website is not so helpful. People have told me that I need a PCI card. Please help as I'm doing my nut.

Nik Smith

A This is a very common problem – the drives power up nicely, the BIOS sees them, so why is Windows blind? In fact, the SATA drives are connected to a SATA controller on your board, and you need to let Windows know how to talk to it.

Your best bet is either to use the floppy that came with the A7N8X, or copy

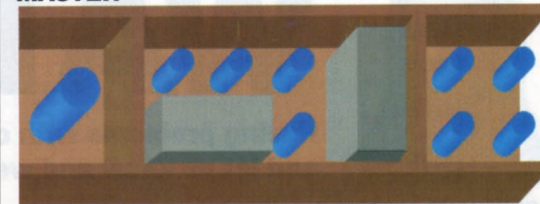
fresh drivers from the ASUS site onto the root of a blank diskette. When the Windows setup starts, you'll see a prompt at the bottom of the screen asking you to hit F6 if you wish to install a third party SCSI or RAID driver. Do so, and when asked for the drivers, insert your floppy. Simple as that.

I SEE PCI

Q Unfortunately, I don't have an AGP or PCI-Express

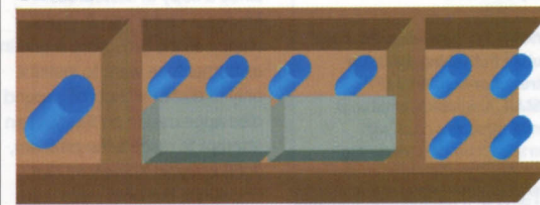
NO LIMITS

HOW TO CONFIGURE YOUR SAMSUNG HDD MASTER



Confused as to why your Samsung HDD isn't holding more than 32GB? Make sure your jumpers are set like this before you format the drive (depending on whether your drive is set as a master or slave), or its capacity will be limited to 32GB. The restriction is for older motherboards and if you're running old versions of Windows which won't recognise or can't write to large capacity HDDs.

SLAVE



port in my motherboard – I only have PCI. I currently have an NVIDIA GeForce FX 5200 – it runs *Half-Life 2* on high detail, but only at 800x600 resolution. Most decent cards out there are for AGP and PCI-Express, so I wanted to know what the best card for the PCI slot is? I want a card that runs the latest games and in high resolution. My specs are Pentium 4 2.5GHz with 768MB RAM.

Adal Ahmad

A If you've got a PCI bus, the GeForce FX5200 is as good as it gets. The old PCI bus is something of a country lane when it comes to traffic flow, and it wouldn't be able to handle the output of a bigger, faster card.

Compare the 133MB/second bandwidth shared between all PCI slots on your motherboard with the 2GB/sec from a dedicated AGP8x port, and then with the 5GB/sec from PCI-Express 2.0 (due at the end of this year), and you can appreciate how things have improved. If you're not happy running your PCI-powered games at lower resolutions, face up to the fact that it's behind the times. If you can save up £300-£450, you can get a great entry-level gaming system with PCI-Express and a wide choice of graphics cards.

NO LIMITS

Q I have a problem! My Master HDD is a Maxtor

40GB formatted as FAT32 and my Slave is a Samsung 120GB with NTFS. I'm running Windows XP Home with Service Pack 2. How I can convert the Master to NTFS without having to format it and lose all my data?

Second, when I right-click my Samsung 120GB in My Computer, Windows says it only has a capacity of 31.4GB! How can that be?

Baz

A I'd not want to use it on important files, but there's a Windows tool that will convert a FAT32 drive to NTFS without loss of data. Open an MS-DOS command prompt and type CONVERT C: /fs:ntfs and hit return, then make yourself a cup of tea.

With regards to the Samsung problem, my guess is you've not set your jumpers correctly. Samsung drives come with two different jumper settings: one for general use and one to limit the capacity to 32GB. Check the diagrams above for the correct settings.

It could also be old hardware, your BIOS simply not seeing the remainder of the drive. Visit the Samsung website at samsung.com and download the Disk Manager tool, which will enable you to sidestep this problem. [E]

Visit Wandy on the Web at www.dearwandy.com



WATCHDOG

Having problems with companies and their non-existent customer service? Write and let us know and we'll kick their door in and stick a microphone in their face...

■ CONSUMER ACTIVIST Suzy Wallace

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

Don't worry - we're here to help when you're at the end of your tether. If you've got a consumer issue that needs addressing, then drop us a line.

WRITE TO Watchdog, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6PP
EMAIL Alternatively, email us at mailbox@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading "Watchdog"

READ ME!

If you're writing in to complain about a product, please furnish us with your full name, address and **contact number**. With PCs, make sure that you also include all **purchasing details** such as reference and invoice numbers.

DANGER! XPLOSIV!

Reader John Murphy was pretty chuffed when Santa dropped a copy of Xplosiv's *MechWarrior 4* into his stocking, especially since a copy of *Motocross Madness* came with it, gratis. Happy as the proverbial swine in excrement, he went to install it only to discover that the second disc appeared to be faulty. In an attempt to resolve the problem, John emailed Xplosiv on two occasions but both mails were eventually returned with a delivery failure. He wonders if Xplosiv is "so inundated with emails that it simply couldn't help it?"

Luckily, our dealings with Empire Interactive (the parent company of Xplosiv) proved a lot more productive. As well as checking its email servers for any records of downtime and the mails that John had sent the company, it also hand-tested some replacements before sending them out with "some extra software in the package to compensate you for any inconvenience regarding this matter". And if that wasn't enough, Empire also apologised that it "had to communicate with you by email. We hope

that this is not looked upon as being an impersonal form of communication, but we did want to correct this matter of customer dissatisfaction as a matter of high priority". Even a premium-rate phone number would be hard-pressed to provide this much of a personal service.

IT'S MADNESS!

Reader Stuart Turnbull recently decided he'd like to dabble in a spot of online rat-bashing, so off he trotted to Canadian website Import Madness (www.importmadness.com). Once there, Stu ordered himself a copy of the all-singing, all-

dancing Collector's Edition of *World Of Warcraft*. Soon enough, his account showed that Blizzard's creation was winging its way to him, but the Bermuda Triangle's borders must have been extended a little, as nearly two months later the product had still not arrived. His five emails sent in query went without a reply and to add insult to injury, upon checking the website he found the item was no longer even being offered for sale.

WOW indeed. We got in contact with Import Madness, who informed us that the location of the parcel was a mystery, as all was well when it left the office. Personally, we suspect that right now a low-life postie is trekking across the world of Azeroth. Unfortunately, due to the product being limited edition, Import Madness had already sold out by the time we got in contact, but it has at least offered a full refund in return. Not exactly what you were after Stuart, but at least you've got your cash back.

GIO GOES MIA

Simon Mealing has a nightmarish tale to tell about GIO Internet. Back in the mists of time he signed up for its broadband offer, paid his registration fees and sat back to wait out the week the company quoted for the line to be activated. Without ever receiving any access to the

The screenshot shows the GIO Internet website. At the top, it says "Internet access, simply cheaper!" and provides a phone number "Call 0870 922 4000". Below this is a navigation bar with links like "Visit Home Page", "Search for", and "Currently Unavailable". The main content area is divided into sections: "Internet Access" with a list of services (Pay As You Go, Anytime, 12M ISDN, Wireless Broadband, Satellite Broadband), "Broadband" with a list of packages (Home 500, Home 1000, Business 500, Business 1000, Business 2000), and "GIO Internet Control Panel" with a list of services (Join GIO Internet, Sign-up Now, Pay As You Go, Anytime, Broadband, ISDN). There is also a "Help & Advice" section and a "Save HUNDREDS On Your Internet Access!" banner.

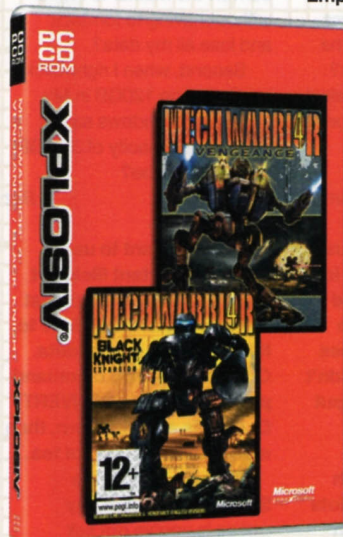
Think twice before handing over your money to Gio.

service, a week later he was informed that it had been cancelled "due to my line not being suitable", and GIO told him that "the initial fee would be refunded to my debit card in due course". Turns out that in this case, "due course" means almost three months. Matter resolved he thought, but in late December Simon received a worrying letter from a debt collection agency representing GIO, which asked for a settlement of £474 or else he'd face legal proceedings.

Barring carrier pigeon and smoke signal, we've attempted every way possible to contact GIO Internet, but with no success. In fact, having a telephone system that asks you to press zero to speak to

the operator, then tells you that the extension is invalid and you will be transferred back to the non-existent operator to resolve your problem is not what we'd call good customer service.

Even more worrying is what we discovered upon trawling the Internet: Simon was not the only person having problems with GIO Internet's service, and was among many contacted by the bailiffs. Watchdog phoned the debt collectors to discover that they're no longer chasing any GIO accounts, so at least that's one worry off your mind Simon. So beware: if even the bailiffs won't deal with them any more, we'd advise you to follow their example. Let GIO Internet near your modem at your peril. [EW]



Free copies of games are only useful if they work...



SAINTS NOT SINNERS

▲ IT'S NOT ALL DOOM AND GLOOM - SOME COMPANIES REALLY CARE, AND WE'RE HERE TO PAT THEM ON THE BACK. STEP FORWARD OVERCLOCKERS

In October 2004, Simon Thornber purchased a Gainward Geforce 6800LE from www.overclockers.co.uk. His textures sparkled and the anti-aliasing amazed - until his card was introduced to a copy of *Half-Life 2*. Gordon's crowbar-wielding antics unfortunately made the screen go black and required his PC to be restarted. Not quite what Valve had in mind we're sure. Simon contacted Gainward, but when he failed to get a response, he trawled its forums and found that he was not the only one with the problem. The only solution appeared to involve the help of a soldering iron and a larger capacitor - hardly the easiest tweak in the world.

However, when he contacted Overclockers, he found the company was more than happy to help. "Despite the card being three months old, despite me not knowing my order number and despite my girlfriend having 'tidied away' the packaging to the bin, a quick five-minute chat and my details were found, the card was arranged to be sent back and I was able to choose an alternative." Top marks to Overclockers for going above and beyond the call of duty.

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BUYER'S GUIDE

"Do I really need it?" "Is it a luxury item?" Hell yes, but buy it anyway. It'll make you feel all fuzzy inside...

Whether you want a new graphics card, motherboard or joystick, this is where to look to find the best on the market. Editor's Choice is the class champ, the product

that will satisfy no matter what you play. Our Recommended product wears a silver medal, not quite as triumphant as the outright winner, but a worthy alternative.

Finally, the Also Consider product is one we believe you should look at too before making your final decision. If you feel we've got something wrong, missed out a great

product or just want to add your own words of wisdom, mail letters@pczone.co.uk. If we act on your suggestion, we might even send you a gift. We're nice like that.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

RECOMMENDED

ALSO CONSIDER

MOTHERBOARDS



A8V DELUXE WIRELESS

STREET PRICE £82
MANUFACTURER ASUSTeK
TELEPHONE 0870 1208 340
WEBSITE uk.asus.com

For the first time, an AMD board takes gold. Based on the VIA K8T800 Pro chipset, the ASUS A8V supports 939-pin Athlon 64 and FX processors (the engines behind the best gaming systems), and up to 4GB of dual-channel PC3200 RAM. Onboard dual RAID, 7.1 sound, automated overclocking and AGP8X complete the picture. The Wireless Edition comes bundled with more.



K8N NEO2 PLATINUM

STREET PRICE £87
MANUFACTURER Micro-Star
TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688
WEBSITE msi.computer.co.uk

MSI's K8N Neo has always boasted stability and performance, and the new 939-pin, nForce3 Ultra variant is just as impressive. The Neo2 supports the new Athlon 64 and FX-53 processors and incorporates a dual-channel memory controller. The board includes 7.1 sound, Gigabit LAN, 8 USB 2.0 ports, 2 x ATA and 4 x SATA connectors. Multi-function RAID is also standard.



IC7-MAX3

STREET PRICE £94
MANUFACTURER ABIT Computer
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.abit.com.tw

Getting on a bit now, the Canterwood-based IC7-MAX3 still provides a solid foundation for any Socket 478 Pentium-based games rig. It even looks great. The board has 5.1 onboard audio with optical out, Gigabit LAN, four-port SATA RAID, and ABIT's usual array of enthusiast-friendly features including SoftMenu Overclocking and OTES cooling. It's a real power-user's delight. If you don't want to stray from Intel, look no further.

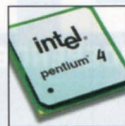
PROCESSORS



ATHLON 64 3500

STREET PRICE £174
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE 01276 803100
WEBSITE www.amd.com

Now the 939-pin chips no longer require registered memory, the AMD64 route is a cheaper option. Smash open your old Pentium PC, snatch the PC3200 sticks from its banks and mate them with a new Athlon on an A8V Deluxe. Although the Hyper-Threading alternatives can be better for business and encoding apps, the 64-bit chips are great for gaming, the 3500 giving best value. Die-hard Intel fans are missing out.



P4 3.2GHZ

STREET PRICE £140
MANUFACTURER Intel
TELEPHONE 01793 403000
WEBSITE www.intel.com

With the price of the 3.0GHz now dropping to well below £200, it makes sense to spend just a little extra on the 3.2GHz. Hyper-Threading delivers a jaw-pounding, double-whammy power hit that pushes benchmark scores well ahead of the equivalent Athlon, and an 800MHz front-side bus paired with the right memory can make its presence felt. If you have a P4 motherboard, you're already set for an upgrade to remember.



ATHLON 64 4000+

STREET PRICE £480
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE 01276 803100
WEBSITE www.amd.com

Although the FX-55 is AMD's hottest tamale, it's more expensive than the 939-pin, 2.4GHz, ClawHammer-based Athlon 64 4000+ chip. And if you're thinking those specs look oddly familiar, full marks: the 4000+ is a rebadged FX-53 with its price shaved by £50, making it the slightly saner choice. Mind you, if you're looking to spend this kind of money, finding the extra nifty for the full-on FX-55 might not be an issue...

HDDS



WD1200JB 120GB

STREET PRICE £53
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

You may well view a 120GB HDD as an extravagance, but with games getting longer and broadband getting wider, a hangar-like hard drive gives you plenty of room for mucking about. You'll also bring that never-ending quest for more room to an abrupt end. The price is just right, and the performance second to none. Like the DiamondMax Plus9, the WD1200JB features an 8MB cache and a speed of 7200RPM.



DIAMONDMAX PLUS9 80GB

STREET PRICE £36
MANUFACTURER Maxtor
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.maxtor.com

The mid-sized Maxtor is for everyone: large, fast and not that pricey. 80GB is more than adequate for work, play and downloading requirements, and if you're greedy for more gig you can jump up a size. The Fast ATA, 7200RPM drive includes Maxtor's Shock Protection System and Quiet Drive Technology, but for the Serial ATA version, expect to pay a £20 premium.



RAPTOR 36GB

STREET PRICE £73
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

If you don't need a deep hole for your data, or if you intend keeping your dirt on a separate drive, the 10,000RPM Serial ATA Raptor makes the ideal foundation for your primary partition. It's wickedly fast, perhaps the fastest HDD available yet, and although designed for server environments, provides gaming desktops with the kind of warp-nine, low access times that make any application more nimble.

GRAPHICS CARD



GEFORCE 6800 GT

STREET PRICE £299
MANUFACTURER XFX Graphics
TELEPHONE 01327 315750
WEBSITE www.xfxforce.co.uk

The release of Doom 3 means that NVIDIA couldn't have timed its return to the top better. The 6800 GT is a slight step down from its über-Ultra card in terms of performance (only by a few frames per second), but at under £300 it gives you much better value for money. If you can afford the not insignificant outlay, this is the card to buy – and your games will love you forever.



GEFORCE 6600GT

STREET PRICE £129
MANUFACTURER Sparkle
TELEPHONE 0191 4210166
WEBSITE www.sparkle-technology.co.uk

Never before has such high performance been available at such a low price. Forget the old mainstream NVIDIA technology, the new stuff is quicker than many of the old high-end cards, and in many tests this 6600 GT beats the FX 5950 Ultra – pair it with an AMD64 and you're laughing. Sparkle's bundle is on the mean side, but we've not yet found a GeForce maker who builds to a higher standard.



RADEON X700 PRO 256MB

STREET PRICE £150
MANUFACTURER Sapphire
WEBSITE www.sapphiretech.com

Hot on the heels of the 6600GT is Sapphire's X700 Pro, featuring PCI-Express, GDDR-3 memory, 8-pixel pipelines and a 128-bit interface. It's a quality product bundled with quality games, and in benchmarks has no trouble keeping up with the runaway GeForce. Unlike the 6600GT, there's no AGP counterpart and it's more money. But if you're looking for a RADEON and maximum mainstream grunt, this is the card for you.

SOUNDCARDS



REVOLUTION 7.1

STREET PRICE £90
MANUFACTURER M-Audio
TELEPHONE 0871 7177 100
WEBSITE www.maudio.co.uk

Although it lacks a few of its rivals' gamer-friendly features, including hardware DirectSound and a joystick/MIDI port, the Revolution more than makes up for any deficit with a truly astonishing quality of sound. Unique technologies enhance your enjoyment of games, music and movies. The software is straight-talking and boasts a familiar look and feel, making the card a delight to work with.



AUDIGY 2 ZS

STREET PRICE £58
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

A quantum leap from its predecessor, the Audigy 2 offers a boggling range of pro-gamer and DVD features, including 6.1 surround sound, EAX Advanced HD, Advanced Resolution DVD-Audio and 24-bit/96kHz recording – it was the first card to gain THX certification from LucasFilm. If you appreciate the immersive experience offered by high-fidelity surround sound, the Audigy gives you an experience like no other.



AUDIGY 2 ZS PLATINUM PRO

STREET PRICE £144
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

With the same core features as its little brother, the Platinum Pro is guaranteed to perform and sound like no other. The external breakout box is a boon for serious listeners, including standard audio connections and volume controls. The big Platinum also offers dual SB1394 firewire ports and optical links, a stereo RCA input, plus MIDI In and MIDI Out mini-DIN sockets.



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EDITOR'S CHOICE

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MX510

STREET PRICE £32
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0217
WEBSITE www.logitech.co.uk

The best example of the MX optical engine, the MX510 is ideal for gaming. Logitech has upped the rate of the MX500's image processing from 4.7 megapixels/ps to 5.8/ps, meaning greater accuracy and smoother movements. It's also increased acceleration from 10g to 15g, which means lag-free responses. The scroll wheel is nicely ratcheted too, and overall it's well balanced for quick movements in FPSs.

NEW ENTRY



OPTICAL MOUSE BLUE

STREET PRICE £17
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 6010 100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk

If you've ever been boggled by the number of buttons on a mouse and have fond memories of a time when three-clickers and a wheel were all you needed, Microsoft's blue rodent is the perfect peripheral. It's nice to look at, nice to hold and, as any veteran FPS gamer will tell you, three buttons is all you need. Plus, the latest optical technology means it works anywhere.



MX700

STREET PRICE £47
MANUFACTURER ACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Sporting the MX optical engine that made Logitech famous with gamers, the MX700 is essentially an MX500 with its tail lopped off. A cradle keeps your desk tidy and acts as a recharger for the unfettered rodent – making the mouse more attractive to people who don't do batteries. However, it's a touch pricey and we remain unconvinced that going cordless is worth the extra stash.

MICE



PC GAMING KEYBOARD

STREET PRICE £39
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451900
WEBSITE www.saitek.com/uk

A simple yet elegant design, with variable backlit keys and peerless build quality make the PC Gaming Keyboard very desirable. The keys are weighted perfectly and are ideal for late-night gaming because they hardly make a sound. Rubber pads stop it sliding, and the Saitek has a programmable command pad which you can position to suit both lefties and righties. Finger heaven.

NEW ENTRY



INTERNET NAVIGATOR

STREET PRICE £21
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

The Internet Navigator lies absolutely flat on your desk, a trademark Logitech design that makes it look sleeker and feel nicer. There's a scroll wheel along the left edge and a raft of customisable function keys to make trawling the Web a cinch – you no longer have to swap back and forth to the mouse, and instead can leave your hands over on the keyboard. Once you browse this way, there's no going back.



PRO KEYBOARD

STREET PRICE £46
MANUFACTURER Apple
TELEPHONE 0800 0391 010
WEBSITE www.apple.com/uk

If you think we're mad for including an Apple keyboard, think again. Anyone looking for a Rolls-Royce keyboard, and who can live without all the additional buttons, scroll wheels and assorted paraphernalia need look no further. The Apple Pro plugs straight into your USB port and, with the help of third-party utilities, disguises the fact that it was designed for computer illiterates with fewer than two mouse buttons.

KEYBOARDS



CYBORG EVO

STREET PRICE £25
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451900
WEBSITE www.saitek.com

A welcome new look for Saitek, with the welcome addition of a four-way adjustable head, larger buttons, plus a meaty damped throttle at the back of the base. As with all Cyborgs, the sculpted hand-rests can be repositioned ambidextrously and suit all hand sizes. An eight-way hat switch, five thumb buttons with trigger, four base buttons and a shift key to double the possible combinations make this a winner.



CYBORG 3D GOLD

STREET PRICE £22
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451900
WEBSITE www.saitek.com

A former Best Buy, the Saitek stick is renowned for the way it can be taken apart and put back together to fit your hand perfectly, and also for its ambidextrous nature – lefties as well as righties can get to grips with it. It features seven fire buttons and, like the Sidewinder, has eight hat buttons, a lever throttle and a twist grip for controlling the rudder. At this price, you'd be daft not to.



HOTAS COUGAR

STREET PRICE £249
MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster
TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881
WEBSITE www.thrustmaster.co.uk

The John Holmes of joysticks. Based on the flight controls of an F-16, sturdy metal construction makes it feel like no other peripheral. With 28 customisable buttons, 18lbs of resistance built into its springs, programmable hat switches and an adaptive action for the separate throttle arm, it transforms any flight simulation and is the ultimate toy for wannabe pilots. It's ten times the cost of a regular joystick, but is in a class of its own.

JOYSTICKS



INSPIRE P580 5.1

STREET PRICE £56
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

We don't like the idea of blowing a ton on speakers, chiefly because the mid-range Creative products are so good. You could spend a little more on a 7.1 set, but you'd lose out on space – and there's little benefit for games players. Instead, stick to the six-speaker P580s, which deliver crisp bass from the subwoofer and a clean, bright sound from the satellites. What's more, this latest design includes a headphone jack too.



Z-640

STREET PRICE £58
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Logitech has patented the pressure-driver design of its subwoofer and we can hear the difference. For the money, the clout is simply amazing – if you're a basshead, you'll love it. Higher frequencies don't disappoint either, the 5.1 sounding almost as clean and inviting as the Inspire 5300s. Unlike the Creative set, the Z-640 has a headphone socket, but it's not conveniently sited. Shame.



MEGAWORKS THX 5.1 550

STREET PRICE £180
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Successor to our Best Performance winner, the Megaworks 550 is a stunning 5.1 setup with five 70W capsule-shielded satellite speakers, a 150W wood subwoofer and a wired remote with a separate headphone socket. Built to THX standards, the sound quality is superb in DVDs and games – Creative's BASH system providing 500W of power that make you leap out of your seat.

SPEAKERS



VP171S

STREET PRICE £299
MANUFACTURER ViewSonic
TELEPHONE 01293 643900
WEBSITE www.viewsonic.co.uk

With a response time of 8ms and both DVI and analog inputs, this ViewSonic LCD was always going to be best suited to gamers. Images are sharp and richly saturated, with a huge range of contrast and brightness. A thin bezel makes it ideal for multi-monitor set-ups. Height adjust, tilt, swivel and even pivot means the 17-inch screen can be put anywhere and made to suit anyone. The only problem is the fiddly buttons on the front.

NEW ENTRY



FLATRON L1730P

STREET PRICE £355
MANUFACTURER LG
TELEPHONE 0870 585000
WEBSITE uk.lg.com

If you're after speed, quality and features, the 17-inch Flatron L1730P is the one to covet. It boasts a 12ms response time, has an amazing picture, a range of colour presets, detachable two-port USB hub and is TCO-03 compliant to boot. This accreditation means there's height and tilt adjust, plus the screen is lit uniformly – it's noticeably a superior image. The only drawback is the price, and the pivot feature won't interest gamers.



VISIONMASTER PRO 514

STREET PRICE £398
MANUFACTURER Iiyama
TELEPHONE 01438 745482
WEBSITE www.iiyama.co.uk

Boasting a 22in Mitsubishi Electric DIAMONDTRON tube, 0.24mm AG pitch and flicker-free refresh rates at immense resolutions, the Iiyama is a breathtaking sight on your desktop – not least because it gobbles so much of it. The big VM also has a comprehensive on-screen menu, USB hub and audio connectors. At 1600x1200, the display is rock steady at 110Hz – and so ideal for gaming.

SCREENS



EXTREME PC GAMING HEADSET

STREET PRICE £15
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.co.uk

This fits all the criteria for a gaming headset: it's comfortable (so you can spend hours shouting at your team-mates without feeling you've been cuffed round the ear), the boom comes with an easy-to-position ratchet and it sports a noise-cancelling microphone with excellent voice reproduction. The cable's a bit short, but that's the only drawback – and at this price, it's a steal.



HS300

STREET PRICE £11
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE europe.creative.com

Light and comfortable and with impressive audio considering the rock-bottom price, the Creative HS300's are well worth considering. Sound is rounded, with a decent scoop of bass, and while they can't match the Logitech Extreme for voice quality, your message still comes across loud and clear. If you're strapped for cash, consider these.



AUDIO 90

STREET PRICE £23
MANUFACTURER Plantronics
TELEPHONE 0800 410014
WEBSITE www.plantronics.co.uk

If your life is online gaming, you need a headset you can wear without developing earache – and the Audio 90 is the most comfortable set out of all the ones we've tested. The secret lies in the fact that you can pivot the speakers, which means they sit flush on your ear and block out any outside noise. Not the most stylish set on the market, but eminently functional.

HEADSETS



MSI
MICRO-STAR INTERNATIONAL

NX6800GT



MAILBOX

This month's mailbox is full of the joys of spring. And the joys of tequila...

■ DOUBLE OR QUITS Dave Woods

EMAIL YOUR RANTS TO
MAILBOX@PCZONE.CO.UK

INDEPENDENCE DAY

First off, I want to tell you how great IndieZone is. I love it. Every month your DVD's packed with some insanely addictive games which are made on little budget. Most are 2D, with so-so graphics and sound, yet I end up playing these games until my eyes bleed – unlike most of the commercial demos on your discs, which I end up playing for ten minutes. I think it's time for developers to get their thinking boots on. Don't

get me wrong, I love to see a game with great graphics, but when it gets boring after ten minutes, I don't see the point.

Gareth Tyler

And nor do we. A lot of the IndieZone games are great – simple, addictive fun – but you can't lump all commercial releases into the ten-minute pile. *Half-Life 2*, *Rome: Total War* and *Far Cry*? Talking of which...

FAR HIGH-FIVE #1

You know when you get those games that make you feel all warm and fuzzy inside? The ones you can't wait to complete yet don't want to, and then once you do complete them you look forward to playing them again half a year later? Well, I haven't had that feeling for a long time, but I finally got *Far Cry* for Christmas and was reunited. Reading your last issue, Dave

Woods said that *Far Cry* is the most underrated game of all time. With the likes of *Half-Life 2* calling the shots it's not surprising – lynch me if you will, but I think *Far Cry* is better! People need to give this game a try and give it the credit it deserves. And thank you for pointing it out.

Mark

FAR HIGH-FIVE #2

Reading your comments about *Far Cry* last issue, I couldn't agree more. I'm not going to get into a flame war about which FPS is the best as it's purely subjective, but for me *Far Cry* has got something no other shooter has and some of my favourite gaming moments of all time. Some praise, eh? And what about *The Project*, the new Crytek stuff you stuck on your

DVD on issue 151. Wow! It's instantly been installed as my most-wanted. Keep up the good work.

Jake Wayneman

Ah, *Far Cry*. The shooter in the sun. Which is, in fact, more than brilliant. And *The Project* does look stunning – if your machine can run it. This isn't the next Crytek game, it's just a work-in-progress demo of its latest engine, but we'll keep you up-to-date with news as we get it.

HELLO. GOODBYE.

Dear PC ZONE. Bought that *Star Wars Battlefront* from Tesco a couple of months back for 30-odd quid. What a load of shite!

Dibs

We might not agree with your sentiment, but we love your down-to-earth reviewing style. Fancy a job?

SEXIST

Now don't laugh at me, but I bought *Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum*

Laude and have spent the last week giggling like a 15-year-old who's stuck a drawing pin on his teacher's chair (I'm actually 26). Now, I know it's not highbrow entertainment (and I wasn't expecting it to be), I know it's not big and I certainly know it's not clever, and I wouldn't want any of my lady friends knowing about it – but it is funny. I think your review was spot-on. Another mag I buy criticised it because all the female characters were just there for you to copulate with. Do you think they've heard of *Leisure Suit Larry* before?

Brian G

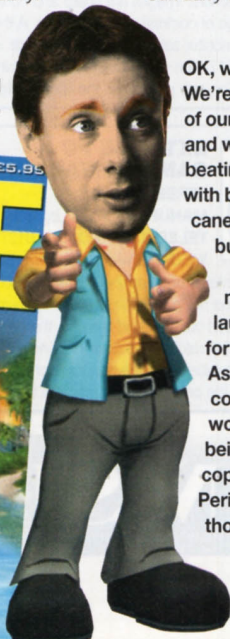
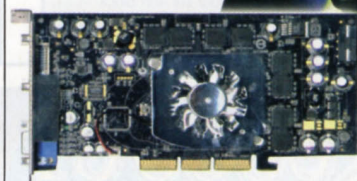
We love *Far Cry*. And Steve 'Leisure Suit' Hill.

SEND US A LETTER AND WIN A SPANKING NEW GRAPHICS CARD

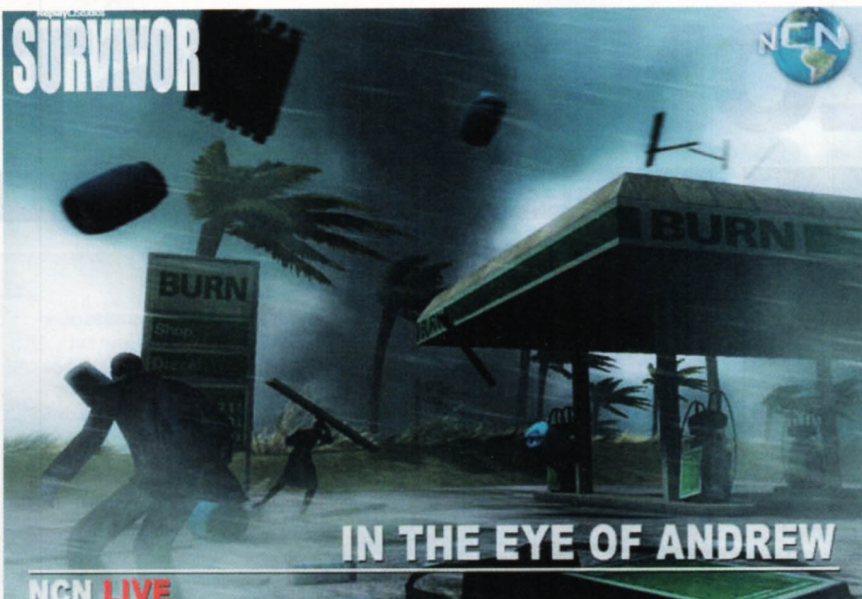
MAILBOX, PC ZONE, FUTURE PUBLISHING, 99 BAKER ST, LONDON, W1U 6FP OR MAILBOX@PCZONE.CO.UK

■ The new XFX 5900 XT is one of the best graphics cards we've ever reviewed, with extreme overclocking, ludicrously fast memory and ultra cooling. Write us a letter and if we think it's the pick of the month, we'll send you one to stick in your PC. What are you waiting for?

WIN!
A TOP
GRAPHICS
CARD



OK, we admit it. We're ashamed of ourselves and we've been beating ourselves with bamboo canes ever since, but *Magna Cum Laude* made us laugh too. Not for long, mind. As for the concept of women just being here to copulate with... Perish the thought.



Is *Survivor* pushing the bounds of gaming taste?

REALITY CHECK

I saw recently that a company wants to develop a game that uses settings such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Hiroshima and the Paraguay mall blaze. OK, I kind of agree with your stance that such games are abhorrent to most people, but what actually is the difference between that and using the Vietnam War or WWII as a setting for a game?

Some titles, including *Medal Of Honor*, use actual photos of men fighting and dying on the field of battle – surely if you ban one type of realistic game, you have to ban them all?

James Rolph

I'd hope we're in a situation where no games are banned, but there are certain boundaries whether you like it or not, and it's up to developers to make sure they stay the right side of them. Otherwise the *Daily Mail* might get involved – and nobody wants that.

LARA MCLARA

I was reading last month's Search for a Game, the one by the over-excited kid who wanted Trigen in *Mario*, and I got to thinking about it. Only, here's my genius idea – instead of mixing up game characters, how about mixing up developers? Can you imagine how good a Lara Croft game would be if it were made by the guys who do *Prince Of Persia* – the franchise would be redeemed! How about if the *FlatOut* team made a new *Carmageddon*? There are so many drifting franchises out there that sometimes you

"I know it's not big and it's certainly not clever, but I thought *Larry* was funny..."

BRIANG SHARES HIS DIRTY SECRET

wish everyone would get together and share.

Jeff McJeff

Have you mixed up your name with someone else's? If not, and that is your real name, you are our new hero. Write in, prove it and we'll send you a prize. And FYI, the new *Tomb Raider* game has been taken off Core and is being developed by Crystal Dynamics, a team eminently capable of redeeming the franchise. Watch this space.

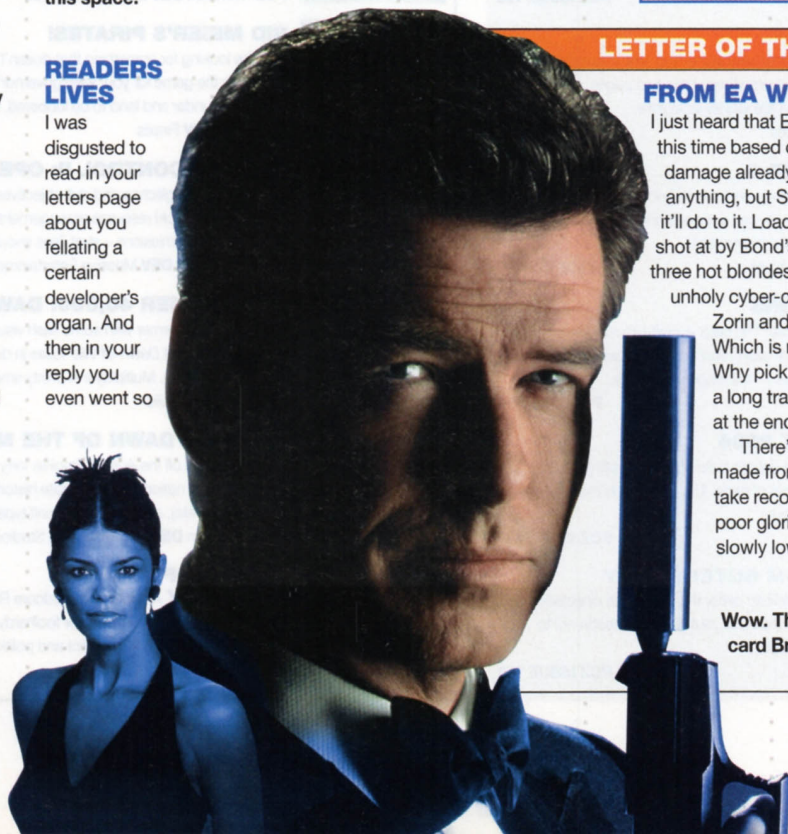
far as to invite another developer in for a go. Do you never think about your readers? I've been a subscriber for almost five years now and I play so many games I've got zero chance of finding a girlfriend. I'm free next Wednesday if you're interested...

Anon

Sorry. Unless you've got something we can put on our cover (and we're not that sort of magazine), you're going to have to try a damn sight harder than that. [X]

READERS LIVES

I was disgusted to read in your letters page about you fellingating a certain developer's organ. And then in your reply you even went so



BACKCHAT

CAN YOU FEEL THE LOVE?

We're a bunch of old romantics on PC ZONE. We love our PC games. Swoon. But then Valentine's Day comes along and if you're not careful, you could end up having to spend time with your girl/boyfriend, wife/lover instead of playing games. What to do? How are you going to deal with the crisis this year? What gifts did you buy?

Escaped_monkey found himself in the wrong thread. "I'm not in the habit of risking you guys printing the fact that I don't have a girlfriend, so I'll be avoiding this thread... Just like the girls avoid me... Sob." Bless. **Cjw101** has a girlfriend, but should he? "My cunning plan is to put my fiancée in hospital..." But just as we were reaching for the phone he continued... "Seriously, she's having all her wisdom teeth taken out – bad timing or what?" It's never good. **JoeyJoJoJnr** had a rather novel solution to the age-old problem. "Luckily, my girlfriend deflates, so I can spend Valentine's Day shooting people online, drinking and wallowing in self-pity." Now why didn't we think of that?

Amazingly, **Quadrasplesn** actually appears to have a girlfriend. "I'm buying her a Pink iPod mini and will then have a massive brownie point overdraft facility." Good to see altruism is alive and well. As it is in some other far-off land, inhabited by **Rolls-Roy**. "I live in a place where this capitalist custom has not taken hold yet. I have made it quite clear to my girlfriend that I will not implement this custom, ever." Good man. **Madameye** takes the prize though for his oh-so-cunning plan. "I shall cook a sumptuous dinner for two: candlelight, soft music and incense. We shall drink the finest wine and talk into the evening where upon she will fall into a gentle slumber. I will carry her to bed, kiss her goodnight and then, ever so quietly, ascend the attic stairs to the place of eternal entertainment. Sshh!" We won't tell if you don't. Oh, hang on...



Cheap date, but it worked.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

FROM EA WITH LOVE

I just heard that EA is going to be making yet another Bond game, this time based on *From Russia With Love*. Hasn't it done enough damage already? I don't want to come over all Alan Partridge or anything, but Stop Getting Bond Wrong! I can just imagine what it'll do to it. Loads of levels set in warehouses with bad guys being shot at by Bond's wristwatch laser while being draped over by three hot blondes. All this, before jumping into space, fighting an unholy cyber-combination of Jaws and Oddjob as built by Max Zorin and then saving the world from aliens or something. Which is nothing like the story in either the film or the book. Why pick *From Russia With Love* anyway? The story is just a long train ride with a bit of a punch-up in a small carriage at the end. Hardly the most action-packed of the series.

There's the potential for a brilliant series of games to be made from the Bond licence in the right hands. But to just take recognised titles and cram them into a series of piss-poor glorified FPSs is criminal. Everyone involved should be slowly lowered into a boiling acid pit filled with piranhas.

Bryan MacAllum

Wow. That was some rant. If we give you a graphics card Bryan, will you try to calm down a little?

THE PCZONE A-LIST

◀ SHOOTERS ▶

HALF-LIFE 2



We always knew that somewhere within our PC there was the potential for absolute, outright brilliance – and now Valve's cracked it. *Half-Life 2* is a masterpiece, and a game that won't be trumped for a long, long time. Maybe not even until *Half-Life 3*. With physics, design, art and ambience to die for, this sequel builds on its Black Mesa roots with stunning aplomb. Gordon Freeman, we salute you.

PUB VU Games DEV Valve
PCZ ISSUE 148



FAR CRY

Far Cry may be several notches beneath *Half-Life 2*, but it remains an outstanding and exhilarating experience that pushes your rig and your nerves to their limits. The narrative may be iffy, but *Far Cry* is a cracking achievement.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Crytek
PCZ ISSUE 140



DOOM 3

Technologically dazzling, genuinely shock-providing and resolutely back to basics: *Doom 3* may not bring anything new to the FPS table, but it's still a stunning thrill-ride that every PC gamer should sample.

PUB Activision DEV id software
PCZ ISSUE 146



CALL OF DUTY

With an excellent expansion in the form of *United Offensive*, *Call Of Duty* remains the best war game on the PC – and possibly of all time. Constantly managing to mix up feelings of dread and excitement, it's an absolute must-play.

PUB Activision DEV Infinity Ward
PCZ ISSUE 136



MAX PAYNE 2

It's Payne! Slicker than slick, breathtaking and quite beautiful, *Max Payne 2* provides the greatest gaming kicks that money can buy. It's extremely short, but so tense and well-designed that you just won't care.

PUB Rockstar Games DEV Remedy
PCZ ISSUE 136



TRIBES: VENGEANCE

A generation-leaping storyline and some silky skiing and sliding slot this remoulding of the online favourite firmly into these hallowed pages. It's a brilliant and original game, even if a few levels are slightly lacklustre.

PUB VU Games DEV Irrational Games
PCZ ISSUE 147



NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2

Style, stealth and magnificent set-pieces are the order of the day in this excellent spy sequel. It looks brilliant, it's well designed and is genuinely funny. What's more, it doesn't treat you like an idiot.

PUB Black Label Games DEV VU Games
PCZ ISSUE 122



HALF-LIFE: GENERATIONS

Long in the tooth? Dated? Not one iota. The original *Half-Life* remains a touchstone for every shooter of recent years, and for good reason: it's fantastic, and remains so to this day. Play it again – the magic's still there.

PUB Vivendi DEV Valve Software
PCZ ISSUE 71



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

It may be a multiplayer game, but the superb bots of *UT2004* still grab it a place in the PC ZONE solo-shooter hall of fame. It's quite simply the greatest deathmatch experience money can buy.

PUB Atari DEV Digital Extremes
PCZ ISSUE 138



RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

A brutal and brilliant shooter that's infinitely better than Riddick's cinematic outing. It may have started out life on the Xbox, but that's no reason not to try out its own brand of violence and filth.

PUB VU Games DEV Starbreeze
PCZ ISSUE 150

◀ STRATEGY ▶

ROME: TOTAL WAR



An engine that makes grown men cry, AI so great that Hannibal could be in charge and a cinematic tinge that grabs your social life and will not let go. *Rome: Total War* is every inch the champion we knew it would be. A few rough edges appear occasionally, but this is strategy far above anything we've seen in *Medieval: Total War* or anywhere else. The greatest battle simulator ever.

PUB Activision
DEV The Creative Assembly
PCZ ISSUE 148



LORD OF THE RINGS: BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

Melding the best of the hardcore and mainstream markets, this strategic gem combines intuitive gameplay with real-life tactics to create an epic, deeply entertaining experience that's dripping with atmosphere.

PUB EA DEV EA Pacific
PCZ ISSUE 149



RISE OF NATIONS

One of the most addictive and satisfying strategy games to land on our desks in ages. Its unique perspective, great gameplay and, now, its excellent expansion *Thrones And Patriots* make it hugely deserving of our prestigious Classic award.

PUB Microsoft DEV Big Huge Games
PCZ ISSUE 129



SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII

The strategy of *Commandos* meets the fun of *Cannon Fodder* in this top-down game of tactics and warfare. Being the underdog has never been so much fun, and the rumbling of distant tanks never so worrying.

PUB Codemasters DEV Best Way
PCZ ISSUE 144



AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

The *Age Of* series goes 3D in Ensemble Studios' best strategy outing to date. Great gameplay, superb attention to detail and a strong storyline give this an unparalleled sense of atmosphere. In addition, it boasts a decent map editor.

PUB Microsoft DEV Ensemble Studios
PCZ ISSUE 123



SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

If you're looking for something that doesn't quite fit into the usual template, *Pirates!* is the game for you. With governor's daughters to dally with, trade routes to plunder and land to be lubbered, *Pirates!* is a winner.

PUB Atari DEV Firaxis
PCZ ISSUE 149



GROUND CONTROL II: OPERATION EXODUS

Despite a few AI glitches and dull objectives, *GCI* is a great game if you prefer tactics to boring old resource management. A superb sci-fi effort with some intense freeform missions – strat-fans should check it out.

PUB VU Games DEV Massive Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 143



WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR

An old school charmer with some flash visuals, varied units and super-flash presentation: what *Dawn Of War* loses in dull AI it wins through with sheer orcish belligerence. Multiplayer is pretty smart too.

PUB THQ DEV Relic
PCZ ISSUE 147



EMPIRES: DAWN OF THE MODERN WORLD

The latest to fall off the *Age Of Empires* lorry may not innovate, but there's a good variety of nations with accurate historical spins (General Patton, Richard the Lionheart etc), as well as novel unit types and well-written campaigns.

PUB Activision DEV Stainless Steel Studios
PCZ ISSUE 135



HEARTS OF IRON II

NEW ENTRY A supremely hardcore RTS with the trappings of *Risk*, this certainly isn't for the uninitiated or foolhardy. Functional graphics hide a deep, complex system of world conflict and politics – if you're clever enough that is.

PUB JoWood DEV Paradox
PCZ ISSUE 152

Want to know which game is the best shooter, which is the top strategy or what to play if you want to blow away your mates online? You've come to the right place – the **PC ZONE A-list** is home to the greatest games in the land. New entries this month include **MMORPG World Of Warcraft** and **Hearts Of Iron II...**

◀ ROLE-PLAYING GAMES ▶

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC



The best RPG to appear for five whole years, and the best *Star Wars* game to surface in ten. *Knights Of The Old Republic* manages to develop the franchise more than even Lucas's cinematic efforts ever could. With beautiful graphics, a gripping plot, oodles of Force powers and supreme character development, this is proof, if ever it were needed, that Bioware is one of the best development houses on the planet.

PUB Activision DEV Bioware
PCZ ISSUE 137

◀ ACTION/ADVENTURE ▶

SPLINTER CELL



At long last we've got a new king of the action-adventures with the Tom Clancy-influenced *Splinter Cell*, and a new crown prince of stealth in the form of the über-flexible Sam Fisher. *Splinter Cell* features the perfect blend of action, structure and pace, combined with some of the best visuals and set-pieces around. No self-respecting gamer should miss out on this.

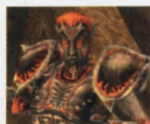
PUB Ubisoft
DEV Ubisoft Montreal
PCZ ISSUE 125



DEUS EX

Great sci-fi plot, amazing attention to detail and unparalleled player freedom: combining the finer elements of *Half-Life*, *System Shock 2* and *Thief*, *Deus Ex* is an RPG of complex beauty and a true revolution in computer gaming.

PUB Eidos DEV Ion Storm
PCZ ISSUE 93



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

One of the most impressive RPGs we've seen in years. A massively open-ended world full of beautiful visuals, superb depth of gameplay and innovative character development make this a classic that will keep you totally absorbed.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Bethesda Softworks
PCZ ISSUE 117



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

The maker of the epic *Baldur's Gate* series proves it's still a leading force in the world of RPGs with this glorious hardcore 3D adventure. It features great single and multiplayer options, along with a very accessible toolkit.

PUB Atari DEV Bioware
PCZ ISSUE 118



PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

An incredible game from Black Isle, using the *Baldur's Gate* engine. With a compelling story, well-scripted dialogue and the best character development we've seen in any game of its kind, this is a dark, adult scorching of an RPG.

PUB Interplay DEV Black Isle Studio
PCZ ISSUE 87



VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE - BLOODLINES

Once you get past the bugs and glitches, *Bloodlines* is a deep, absorbing game that everyone with an interest in the genre should play. Great dialogue, clever plot and (despite the dodgy combat), a superb experience.

PUB Activision DEV Troika Games
PCZ ISSUE 150



DUNGEON SIEGE

Graphically brilliant, massively enjoyable and highly immersive, *Dungeon Siege* is one of the best RPGs to date and only misses out on a Classic award because of the shortcomings in the narrative.

PUB Microsoft DEV Gas Powered Games
PCZ ISSUE 115



SYSTEM SHOCK 2

Definitely one of the most original and disturbing games to hit the PC, *System Shock 2* manages to successfully mix the genres of role-playing, action and adventure into one. Play it with the lights off if you're hard enough.

PUB EA DEV Irrational Games
PCZ ISSUE 80



BALDUR'S GATE II

The original *Baldur's Gate* was hailed as one of the best story-driven role-playing games ever. The sequel isn't vastly different, but it's bigger, better and still extremely addictive. If PC role-playing's your thang, this is essential.

PUB Interplay DEV Bioware
PCZ ISSUE 96



DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR

It's had most of its role-playing elements sucked out and developed a strong console bias, but the gripping plot and action remain intact. It wasn't the revolution we wanted, but it's still a worthwhile purchase.

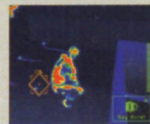
PUB Eidos DEV Ion Storm
PCZ ISSUE 137



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

A beautiful game with a myriad of styles that evokes the spirit of *Little Big Adventure*, along with a touch of *Zelda* sparkle. Whether you're fighting government conspiracies or photographing wildlife, it's never dull.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Ubisoft
PCZ ISSUE 138



SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW

Two games in one: a set of excellent, if not revolutionary, missions for Sam Fisher coupled with a scintillating spies vs mercs multiplayer mode. Single-player is more of the same, but that's no bad thing is it?

PUB Ubisoft DEV Ubisoft
PCZ ISSUE 141



THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS

Garrett's new adventure is sure to thrill, although you can't help but feel that it's been hampered by console considerations. That said, sublime level design, amazing sound and real scares make it an excellent buy.

PUB Eidos DEV Ion Storm
PCZ ISSUE 144



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

He may have gone all moody on us in *Warrior Within*, but we still prefer the Prince's younger, more innocent days of *Sands of Time*. Combat is iffy, granted, but there's a rare charm here that the sequel could not replicate.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Ubisoft Montreal
PCZ ISSUE 136



GRIM FANDANGO

If you've followed LucasArts from the early days of *Monkey Island*, *Sam & Max* and *Day Of The Tentacle*, this is a must. The scripting is impeccable, while sublime graphics and brilliant humour ensure it's top of its genre.

PUB Activision DEV LucasArts
PCZ ISSUE 71



THE SUFFERING

A survival horror that's refreshingly fast and fluid, *The Suffering* takes place in an Alcatraz-style prison and surprised us with its ingenuity and tension-fused set-pieces. It gets slightly repetitive, but it's worth a ride.

PUB Midway DEV Surreal Software
PCZ ISSUE 145



SILENT HILL 2: DIRECTOR'S CUT

Survival horror games have truly come of age with this superbly creepy and atmospheric offering. The (near identical) third game is also out, but for our money this is still the champ. Classy and disturbing.

PUB Konami DEV Konami
PCZ ISSUE 126



METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SUBSTANCE

A convincing PC conversion that adds tanker-loads of side-missions, training stages and unlockable characters to the PS2 original. There's too much waffle, but it's still an excellent third-person sneakfest.

PUB Konami DEV Konami
PCZ ISSUE 127



SOUL REAVER 2

With narrative and puzzles that *Legacy Of Kain: Defiance* failed to improve on, this instalment of the Raziel saga is well worth a look. Compelling storyline and satisfying combat make it an excellent budget buy, despite the ageing graphics.

PUB Eidos DEV Crystal Dynamics
PCZ ISSUE 111

◀ GOD GAMES ▶

BLACK & WHITE



Although it had its critics, we still stand by our original verdict. Peter Molyneux's vision is pure and the design of the game breaks boundaries and serves as a blueprint for the future. The add-on *Creature Isle* is also available, which cuts down on micro-management and enables you to guide your creature through a variety of mini-games. Pure genius in a box.

PUB EA DEV Lionhead Studios
PCZ ISSUE 100



CIVILIZATION III

Civilization III sticks to the same compulsive gameplay that made the first two games so popular. Die-hard Civ fans will relish the improved visuals and animation, while the new user-friendly interface makes the game accessible to the first-timer. Brings to mind the maxim 'if it ain't broke...'

PUB Atari DEV Firaxis Games

PCZ ISSUE 111



EVIL GENIUS

It's always more fun being the bad guy, and when you're an insane megalomaniac it's even better. *Evil Genius* awakens the Blofeld inside you, with all the henchmen, lairs and diabolical plans you could ask for. Basic graphics, ace gameplay.

PUB VU Games DEV Elixir

PCZ ISSUE 147



THE SIMS 2

We still hate *The Sims*, we hate them and everything they stand for, but even we have to admit that the sequel's a good game in itself. We found it addictive and absorbing when we reviewed it – but we'll have changed our tune by the time the fifth expansion pack is dribbled onto the market.

PUB EA DEV Maxis

PCZ ISSUE 147



VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG

An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself, *Make It Big* provides hotels, casinos and over-priced magic shows that let you suck the money out of punters' pockets. It can get a little too fiddly, but it looks and plays really well. A PC ZONE 'Essential'.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Deep Red

PCZ ISSUE 135



SPACE COLONY

Whether you're trying to attract space-tourists or battle neighbouring aliens, taking control of 20 rowdy space colonists and pandering to them makes for a charming and original management jaunt, with plenty of missions to keep you busy for a fair while.

PUB Gathering DEV Firefly Studios

PCZ ISSUE 136



ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3

A stirring return for the ride-creating cash-cow that brings with it a snazzy 3D engine and more coasters than you can shake a stick at. It doesn't quite recall the *Theme Park* glory days, but *RT3* is the closest we've been in ages.

PUB Atari DEV Frontier Developments

PCZ ISSUE 149

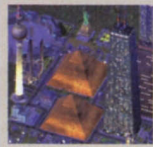


EMPEROR: RISE OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

This intricate game comes from the same stable as *Zeus* and *Caesar* – and they know a thing or two about city building. There's a massive amount of gameplay and more than 50 missions spanning seven historic campaigns. As well as the economic considerations, you'll have to follow feng shui and the Chinese zodiac.

PUB VU Games DEV Breakaway Games

PCZ ISSUE 121



SIM CITY 4

The latest outing of the best-selling city-building sim goes 3D. Unfortunately, there are no huge leaps forwards in gameplay, but there are plenty of features, such as regional cities, imported characters from *The Sims* and a terrain editor to keep you occupied.

PUB EA DEV Maxis

PCZ ISSUE 125



GHOST MASTER

Take your team of ghosts into the town of Gravenille and solve some otherworldly problems, scare a few mortals and bag yourself some new team-mates in this innovative spook 'em up. *Ghost Master* is one of the freshest and funniest games we've seen for a long time.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Sick Puppies

PCZ ISSUE 130

◀ MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ▶

EVERQUEST II



The best just got soooo much better. As visually alluring as a lingerie-clad supermodel holding a giant meat pie, as full of content as the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and as addictive as purple Fruit Pastilles topped with Pringles. Sony has learnt every lesson it could in the five years since the original and produced a MMOG that sets new standards across the board.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Sony Online Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 150



WORLD OF WARCRAFT

NEW ENTRY The most popular PC game of all time according to reports, *WoW* is the 'other' best MMOG ever. Less realistic and perhaps a touch more fun than *EQII*, it's horses for courses as to which one you choose. The only real difference is that *WoW* is PvP based.

PUB VU Games DEV Blizzard

PCZ ISSUE 152



CITY OF HEROES

It may not have scored as high as the others in our review, but this spandex-wearing, justice-dispensing, superhero-themed MMOG has certainly won over the popular vote. Long-term appeal may be dubious, but for instant-action fun, it simply can't be beaten.

PUB NCsoft DEV Cryptic Studios

PCZ ISSUE 149



PLANETSIDE

The eternal war for Auraxis just keeps on going, but now with giant battlemechs thrown into the mix. The subterranean *Core Combat* expansion may have disappeared down its own hole, but recent updates have managed to keep the fighting fresh.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Sony Online Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 131



EVE ONLINE

Best described as 'Elite Online', the sedate nature of *EVE* has managed to pull in more and more space traders with each passing month. It may not be the most human of MMOGs, but it's definitely worth putting the time into it considering what you get back.

PUB CCP DEV CCP

PCZ ISSUE 130



ANARCHY ONLINE

Quirky science-fiction action abounds in this ever-popular take on mankind's distant future. Two major expansions (one practically bigger than the original game) and a forthcoming graphical overhaul is doing more than enough to keep the world of Rubi-ka buzzing.

PUB Funcom DEV Funcom

PCZ ISSUE 148



FINAL FANTASY XI ONLINE

Probably the best of the non-*EverQuest* fantasy MMOGs (although not by much), this Japanese entry into the genre is about as fully realised a world as you can get. The controls may be cumbersome, but you can't deny the atmosphere that lies within.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Square Enix

PCZ ISSUE 148



DARK AGE OF CAMELOT

The fantasy version of *Planetside* (although without the FPS-trappings) is still going strong, despite firm opposition. It's starting to show its age now, although a graphical overhaul due in a few months time might be enough to keep it competitive.

PUB Mythic Entertainment DEV Mythic Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 149



STAR WARS GALAXIES

Jump To Lightspeed has recently added the final piece of the *Star Wars* jigsaw – space combat – but is it too little, too late? There's a loyal audience of Jedi wannabes in there, but the Force is growing weaker. Nonetheless, there's still plenty to admire here, including a superb skill system.

PUB Activision DEV Sony Online Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 151



EVERQUEST

The original can't compare to its sequel in terms of looks and polished gameplay, but five years of expansions have kept its half a million regular players more than happy. There's more on the way too, just in case you feel like keeping it old school.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Sony Online Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 149

◀ ONLINE SHOOTERS ▶

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004



A fleshed out, revamped *UT* offering that far exceeds both its predecessors and our expectations. Extra game modes, superb vehicles plus inspired weapons and features make this one of the best multiplayer blasts around. The new Onslaught mode has given a new dimension to the series, adding tactical awareness to the list of skills online shootists need to master. It even plays well offline, making *UT2004* the definitive choice.

PUB Atari DEV Digital Extremes

PCZ ISSUE 138



BATTLEFIELD 1942

Not much in single-player, but online this Swedish gem has redefined the way online shooters work. Infantry, jeeps, tanks, planes, bombers, ships – the total WWII experience (minus the searing horror and psychological scarring for life).

PUB EA DEV Digital Illusions

PCZ ISSUE 121



JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING

150 players! Count 'em. Some say a world record (although *PlanetSide* begs to disagree), this is modern-day online warfare at its finest. Quality maps, plenty of vehicles and the best helicopters in the business – why, it even has useful mortars.

PUB NovaLogic DEV NovaLogic

PCZ ISSUE 145



BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM

Take *BF1942*, drop it into the '60s and bingo – the total Vietnam war experience. More claustrophobic than *BF1942*, which suits the jungle warfare period setting, this has a great '60s mood: all it needs is the late Brando and it'd be perfect.

PUB EA DEV DICE Canada

PCZ ISSUE 141



COUNTER-STRIKE SOURCE

The daddy of all online shooters is back, running on the jaw-dropping Half-Life 2 engine. All your favourites are here – Dust, Italy, Office – all with realistic physics. The only thing missing is HL2's ability to pick up objects, but it's surely only a mod away.

◀ SPORT ▶

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005



Eidos and the *Champ Man* licence have got a hell of a lot to beat in Sports Interactive's *Football Manager* – easily the most streamlined and absorbing management game to come out of its stable to date. It's management in its purest form, with an improved match engine working under the bonnet of a sparkling (well, green and gray) redesigned interface. We're just as addicted as we always were.

PUB Sega DEV Sports Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 149



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4

Fact. This is the finest arcade football game ever. Incomparably better than any *FIFA* offering, *PES* is the only footie game that plays like the real thing – with all the joys and agonies that entails.

PUB Konami DEV Konami

PCZ ISSUE 149



VIRTUA TENNIS

Who would have believed that this console favourite would translate so well to the PC? Its control interface is supremely intuitive, while the AI is massively challenging. Best of all, though, are its truly sublime multiplayer options.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Hitmaker/Strangelite

PCZ ISSUE 114



TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2005

Some new game modes gives 2005's Tiger 'em up some welcome variety – although even without them, it would remain the PC's premier golf sim. This year is a good vintage too, with visuals to die for.

PUB EA Sports DEV EA Sports

PCZ ISSUE 148



NHL 2005

Shiny and beautiful, yet nowhere near as vapid as its *FIFA* compatriot, EA's *NHL* series continues its run of consistent excellence. Better AI, better production and as slick as they come.

PUB EA Sports DEV EA Sports

PCZ ISSUE 148

◀ DRIVING GAMES ▶

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY



PS2 owners will finally stop gloating when they see *Vice City*'s glorious PC incarnation. *GTA3* was an incredible crim-sim; so incredible that it was hard to see how it could be improved, but the freedom and variety of its follow-up is blinding. Whether it's carrying out its remarkably inventive law-breaking missions or just shooting pedestrians, *Vice City* is about as close to gaming perfection as you can get.

PUB Rockstar Games DEV Rockstar North

PCZ ISSUE 131



GRAND THEFT AUTO III

It may have been overshadowed by its younger brother, but *Grand Theft Auto III* remains as awesome as it ever was. It's a great spin on both driving and shooting genres and you'll still love its noisy orgy of violence and speed.

PUB Rockstar Games DEV Rockstar North

PCZ ISSUE 117



TOCA RACE DRIVER 2

The most comprehensive driving game on the PC, *TOCA 2* is a must-have if you're into motors. With 15 different motorsports to master, 52 tracks and rival drivers with good AI smarts, it's the best racer on the market.

PUB Codemasters DEV Codemasters

PCZ ISSUE 142



COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2005

More of a tweak than an overhaul, the fifth *McRae* boasts immaculate handling and oodles of gameplay potential. With excellent damage modelling and plentiful motor-fiddling opportunities, it's the best rally game around.

PUB Codemasters DEV Codemasters

PCZ ISSUE 148



NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2

A sequel that's both bling and wicked, *NFSU2* capitalises on its predecessor's might with a superb free-roam mode, astounding graphics and even more mods, nips and tucks for your motor. It's most definitely very whack.

PUB EA DEV EA

PCZ ISSUE 150

◀ 3D ACTION / STRATEGY ▶

OPERATION FLASHPOINT GOLD



Now available with the tricky *Red Hammer* add-on, *Flashpoint* has become to tactical action what *Half-Life* was to shooters. Fight on foot or in tanks, fly planes or even direct an entire platoon, this game is total war – in your face and on a massive scale. The graphics are an acquired taste, but they convey a sense of wide-open warfare perfectly. It's the ultimate military simulation, with a stunning atmosphere and superb missions.

PUB Codemasters DEV Bohemia Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 104



HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2

With a real Boy's Own-feel, a ninja-bastard difficulty rating and the same superb engine as *Mafia*, *H&D 2* is one of the finest squad-based tactical shooters around. It's got a few bugs, but it's still an essential purchase.

PUB Gathering DEV Illusion Softworks

PCZ ISSUE 136



RAINBOW SIX: RAVEN SHIELD

All the style and presentation you would expect from a Tom Clancy game, from the realism of the weapons down to footprints in the snow. A tactical and atmospheric game that can be frustratingly tricky at times.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Ubisoft Montreal

PCZ ISSUE 127



FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR

A remarkably innovative military simulator, *FSW* provides tense urban combat with you in a commanding role – despite feeling as if you're in the line of fire with your two fire-teams. It gets repetitive, but it's worth a look.

PUB THQ DEV Pandemic Studios

PCZ ISSUE 147



HIDDEN & DANGEROUS: DELUXE

This revamp of *H&D* removes all of the infamous bugs from the original, as well as including three extra campaigns. There's been a lot of work put into improving the graphics and modding fans will relish the new editor that ships with this edition.

PUB Take 2 DEV Illusion Softworks

PCZ ISSUE 115

DISC PAGES

DOUBLE-TROUBLE!

The PC ZONE DVD is now double-sided, which means you get twice as much content as before. If you can't find what you're looking for on the DVD, close the PC ZONE disc browser and turn the disc over.

ALL CHANGE

DISCWORLD

■ WORDS & DISCS Suzy Wallace

▲ If you're eagle-eyed, you may have noticed a couple of changes this month. For the less astute, not only have we got the latest and greatest content on the discs for you (as always), but you can also say a big hello to our new disc interface. Gone is the tired interface of old, to be replaced by the all-singing, all-dancing one that's nestling on the discs right now. Love it or loathe it, let us know what you think of it at mailbox@pczone.co.uk.

On the other hand, you may have noticed that the Disc Pages are devoid of a Movies section this month, so let me explain. Most games are traditionally exempt from classification by the BBFC (apart from the really violent or sexually explicit ones). To date, any movies depicting a game in action have also been exempt, but the powers that be have now determined that any non-interactive content (ie a movie) has to be classified. Since we only found out at the end of the issue, we were simply unable to get any ratings before going to press. My apologies, slap on the wrist, I'll try to do better next time.

As for what you can find on this month's disc, we've got Sam Fisher's stealthy new outing in *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory*, more acrobatic antics from the *Prince of Persia: Warrior Within*, bizarre but brilliant strategy in *Darwinia*, all of the mod finalists for the Make Something Unreal competition and much more!

SPLINTER CELL CHAOS THEORY

CD1/DVD Pub: Ubisoft Dev: Ubisoft Montreal

CLOAK YOURSELF in darkness and don your night vision goggles – Sam Fisher is back and he's in better shape than ever. With an all-new graphics engine that's got our mouths watering and some nifty new terrorist-taking techniques, what

better use to put it to than to save the world in a covert operation? There's a bunch of revolutionaries about who've taken a hostage to steal his cyber plans – so who better for the job?

CHALLENGE SUZY!

IN GOOD STEALTH
Take out every enemy soldier by using silent weapons throughout.



In a rare moment of light, Sam Fisher's world is revealed. Here's how to make the most of it.

- 1 Lights** – Sam is master of the darkness, so lightbulbs aren't exactly his favourite object. Shoot them out with your pistol to stay unseen.
- 2 Darkness meter** – This displays how much light Sam is positioned in. Use the shadows to keep it as far left as possible.
- 3 Sound meter** – This shows how much noise you are making. The faster the movement, the louder Sam is, so it's best to creep about as much as you can.
- 4 Ledges** – Make like a monkey and hang from ledges to stay unseen, or even to ambush unsuspecting foes.
- 5 Enemies** – Even in the darkest of corners, there's a limit to how close an enemy soldier can get before he spots you. Try and stay behind guards to take them down, stealth-style.
- 6 Crouching** – Apart from being the coolest way for a special ops guy to move around, crouching reduces the noise you make when moving.

HANDY MAN

Where would a special operative be without his tools? You're probably familiar with most of Sam's tricks by now, but for the uninitiated few, here's some of his more handy gizmos



SLICE AND DICE

The combat knife is new to *Chaos Theory* and proves handy for a couple of reasons: the first being that it's great for interrogating and stealthily dispatching enemies, and the second is that it allows you to slice your way into tents.



UNDER SURVEILLANCE

The stickycams are much more versatile in this episode of Sam's all-conquering stealth missions, allowing you to put them in place, deploy some more and then switch between them to remotely view areas remotely.



PEEK-A-BOO

Somewhat similar to peepholes on front doors, this fibre optic camera is inserted under the door to allow you to look on the other side. You can then move it from side to side to check out the best approach for when you open the door.



IMPORTANT!

You can find all of the content here on the DVD, but we can't cram everything onto the two CDs. This is because we can get more than six times the content on our double-sided DVD, including a

library of patches and utilities, along with DVD-video (that you can watch on your TV), bigger movies and more playable demos. Demos and movies are getting bigger all the time, and certain

games are going to be released on DVD-only. If you still haven't upgraded to DVD, do it now. You can pick up a cheap drive for about £20, so there's no excuse. Unless you're a real pikey.

PRINCE OF PERSIA: WARRIOR WITHIN

CD2/DVD Pub: Ubisoft Dev: Ubisoft Rev: Issue 150, 83%



HIS ARABIAN

Highness himself is back to take you on another whirlwind demonstration of *Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within*. If the last demo seemed to concentrate on his slick fighting

moves, this one might as well be entitled *Circus Trainee*. Featuring some of the cool puzzle-button-trap combinations that epitomise the game and a fair smattering of enemies too, you'll spring, leap and bound your way around this fantastic level.

ROYAL DUTIES

Unlike our own Royal Family, the Prince seems to be a pretty good person to have around in a sticky situation: no skiing in Europe or spending summer at Balmoral for him. Here's a few examples of the kind of thing he gets up to...



TIMING

If you're having difficulty getting something just right, use the Sands of Time to help out and slow things down a little.



ACROBATICS

Leaping, hanging and rolling is what our regal buddy does best, and this demo demands plenty of fancy footwork for you to get around.

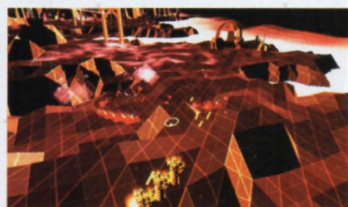


SWORDPLAY

The Prince still gets plenty of chances to bloody his swords. This ugly mofo provides a suitable midway challenge to spice things up.

DARWINIA

CD1/DVD Pub: Introversion Dev: Introversion Rev: Issue 153, 84%

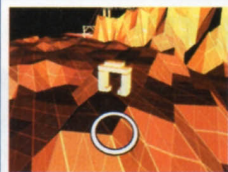


WE'RE sure that opinion on *Darwinia* will be split: some will see it as a welcome dose of originality, others as the

harebrained result of a boozy night down the pub. We reckon it's a healthy combination of both, but check out this one-level demo and make up your own mind. Mine resources, destroy monsters and herd your Darwinians to safety.

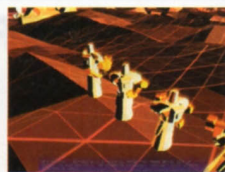
YOU'RE THE BOSS

As the Darwinians themselves are not directly controllable, you'll have to use your other minions to do your dirty work for you...



ENGINEERS

Created by drawing three sides of a square in the Task Manager menu, your engineers float around the landscape collecting souls of destroyed enemies, and taking them to an incubator to be processed into more Darwinians.



SQUAD

Created by drawing a triangle in the Task Manager menu, the squads are your way of getting rid of any viral nasties lurking about the world. Right-click to fire the squad's lasers and while you're doing this, left-click to throw a grenade.



OFFICERS

Created by drawing a tick in the Task Manager menu and then selecting the lucky Darwinian, officers are a special type of Darwinian that you can control directly. Use its field of influence to tell the other Darwinians where to go.

EIGHT-LEGGED FREAKS!

Can you take out the big, red, spider-like monsters on the mining island with your squads? (Hint: judicious use of grenades is advised)

CHALLENGE SUZY!

TYPING OF THE DEAD

DVD Pub: Sega Dev: Smilebit



Blue veins
Blue veins

Know - all
Know - all

IF YOU'VE read the *House Of The Dead 3* review on page 86, you'll know that we prefer the fleet-fingered approach of *Typing Of The Dead* to its console-happy brethren, so here's a chance for your fingers to 'do their thang' in the zombie killing department. Didn't you know secretaries are the ultimate defence against a world filled with undead beings?

CHALLENGE SUZY!

TOUCH TYPE
How far can you get on the special key practice?

CLASSIC DEMO



REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION

DVD Pub: Eidos Dev: Elixir Studios Rev: Issue 132, 88%

THIS demo for *Republic: The Revolution* is incredibly tardy – around 16 months in fact. What you get is a one-hour time limit in which you can experience Elixir's entire game of political intrigue, which is then unlockable to give you the full game.

WILL OF STEEL

DVD Pub: GMX Media Dev: Gameyus Rev: Issue 149, 79%

THE *Will Of Steel* demo featured last month has now been superseded by this improved demo. Featuring not one, not two, but three levels set in the Bush-favoured hotspots of the world, if you like an RTS to be action-heavy and without the chore of resource collecting, this could be just the ticket.



UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE 2004-2005

CD2/DVD Pub: EA Dev: EA Sports Rev: Issue 152, 76%

GRAB your kit and head for the benches – here's your chance to experience EA's take on the beautiful game with this *UEFA Champions League 2004-2005* demo. Offering the chance to play as Mourinho's Chelsea against German team Bayern München, if you're a footie fan you can really get stuck in as you listen to the in-game banter on the radio show.



● **ALSO ON THE CD** Contents of this month's Indie Zone and Freeplay.
● **ALSO ON THE DVD** *Settlers: Heritage Of Kings*, *Ford Racing 3* and this month's Game That Changed The World: *Battlefield: 1942*.

MAKE SOMETHING UNREAL

GRAND FINALISTS

ON THE DVD

The Make Something Unreal contest is run by Epic in order to encourage and reward the UT2003/4 mod-making community. \$1,000,000 in prize money has now been given out in prize awards and with the Grand Final results announced, we've brought you the cream of the crop that made it all the way to the top.



1ST

RED ORCHESTRA

This highly polished mod has been a work in progress for over three years now, and it just gets better. Best described as bringing the action of *Call Of Duty* to *UT2004*, the setting is WWII and the vodka-drinking Ruskies are pitted against the Nazi invaders. **STATS** 610MB, multiplayer mod



2ND

DAMNATION

This second-place winner has originality in bags as you take your role in its self-styled 'steampunk fantasy-western' world. As well as the traditional first-person shooter ingredients, the mod features platform elements that enable you to climb, hang and swing from pieces of the scenery. **STATS** 218MB, single-player mod



3RD

AIR BUCCANEERS

A personal favourite, *Air Buccaneers* features breathtaking visuals combined with original gameplay based on pirate-like action in huge balloons. If you fancy a change from the standard TCs flying about the Internet, there's no better place to start than with this. **STATS** 225MB, multiplayer mod



4TH

ALIEN SWARM

Who would have thought that *UT2004* could spawn a top-down, tactical shooter? Black Cat Games has taken the mod community by storm with *Alien Swarm*, a mod that gives you the chance to blast aliens with your marine squad. **STATS** 122MB, single and multiplayer mod with co-op option



5TH

METABALL

This single-player mod is another of the ilk that may have you scratching your head when you discover it's derived from *UT2004*'s hectic blasting action. Playing with your balls is essential - you help creatures by becoming balls with different properties in this novel little puzzler. **STATS** 90MB, single-player mod



6TH

STRIKE FORCE

If you're a CS fan, you may find yourself tempted by this terrorist vs. counter-terrorist action mod. Rescue hostages, escape from the enemy, work in a team or on your own in deathmatch, and all whilst sitting pretty in beautifully detailed character models, weapons and maps. **STATS** 298MB, single and multiplayer



7TH

FRAG OPS

A semi-realistic tactical shooter set in a near-future WWII environment. Featuring 28 unique weapons, seven vehicles (the latest patch even enables you to pilot a Comanche helicopter) and 17 maps at the last count, if you want some tactical shooting in *UT*, this is your mod! **STATS** 463MB, single and multiplayer mod

● ALSO ON THE CD The Frozen Throne map and three Ground Control 2 maps.

EXTENDED PLAY

GARRY'S MOD

ALTHOUGH WE featured it last month, the latest release of *Garry's Mod* has provided the ZONE office with so much amusement that it simply deserves another mention. If you missed out before, the mod turns you loose in a large environment with full reign over the Source engine's extensive array of physics capabilities. Among the tools on offer are a prop-firing rocket launcher, a scanner-attaching pistol and a rope-tying crossbow, as well as our favourite feature: the genius ability to pose ragdolls (take a look at the screenshot below). You also have the opportunity to cobble together working



vehicles out of in-game objects. Many a lunch-hour's been wasted building a buggy from a drinks machine! **DON'T MISS** The new ability to pose the ragdoll faces. Alyx Vance, pucker up girl!

OTHER HALF-LIFE 2 CONTENT



ON THE DISCS

this month are two fantastic *Half-Life 2* single-player maps for you to try out. Day Hard sees you making your way through an abandoned apartment to reach the safety of Father Grigori, while *Combine Onslaught* sets you and your rebel friends against a marauding force of Combine soldiers. And don't forget the excellent single-player *Substance* mod to keep Gordon going strong too!



COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE MAP



LIKE A SCENE

from *Honey, I Shrunk The Kids*, this great *Counter-Strike: Source* map is set in a bedroom from the viewpoint of a little critter. With the level being accessible from tunnels in the walls, vents and skirting boards, and the chance to snipe from the lights in the ceiling, life as a bug doesn't sound so bad!



MODS OF THE MONTH

CD1/DVD HERE'S A

quick rundown on the other mods featured on this month's discs. *Enemy Territory Fortress* allows you to play the beloved game mode in *ET*, classic *Doom* regresses *Doom 3* to feel more like the original, *Operation Peacekeeper* pits the Germans against the Serbs in *Battlefield Vietnam* and *Cinema* offers *Max Payne 2* a more cinematic feel and extra features for the troubled cop.



BUG-FIX OF THE MONTH

Bizarre Problems Fixed In A Patch

THIS MONTH: SOLDNER: SECRET WARS

Patch v30830 fixes a bug that when climbing over a fence, you occasionally reappear on the same side you started on.

● ALSO ON THE DVD *SpellForce Map Editor*

HELP!

CD trouble? Don't worry - phone our helpline on 01225 442244 and ask for cover disc support. Or email support@futurenet.co.uk.

BEFORE YOU DIAL...

If you're calling the helpline:

- If possible, have your PC operating and near the phone when you call.
- If this is not possible, note down all relevant information - ie system type,

soundcard, RAM and so on, along with the nature of the fault.

- Have a pen and paper to hand so you can jot down the relevant info.

MINIMUM SPECIFICATION

- To run the software on these discs, you need at least a PIII 1GHz or equivalent, with a GeForce 3 64MB graphics card and 256MB RAM (512MB recommended for Windows XP users).

DISCLAIMER

- This disc has been thoroughly tested at all stages of its production. However, it's always wise to use a virus checker on any software before running it.
- Future Publishing Limited cannot accept responsibility for any loss, disruption or damage to your data or your computer system (including hardware) that may occur while using either the disc or programs and data on it.

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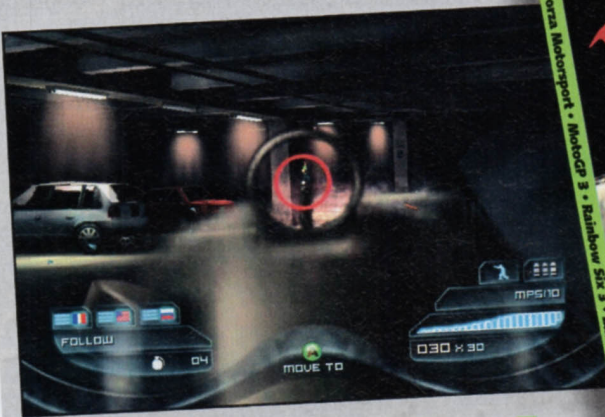
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EXPLORED AND TAMED!

PROJECT SNOWBLIND

2005'S SCI-FI SHOOTER
BLOWN WIDE OPEN!

Forza Motorsport

Microsoft unleashes its might on the car-modding scene! We play it and probe it for your pleasure across six must-read pages!



Rainbow Six 4: Lockdown

We go hands-on with the multiplayer options, exposing the full might of the new team-based shooter's online game. And there's only one winner - YOU!

ISSUE 39 ON SALE THURSDAY MARCH 3



GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD



BATTLEFIELD 1942

Today, the idea of a non vehicular-based online shooter is almost unthinkable, but not so long ago things were very different. **Martin Korda** takes a brief journey back in time...

GAME Battlefield 1942**DEVELOPER** Digital Illusions**PUBLISHER** EA**RELEASED** 2002

INFLUENCED Battlefield 1942 was the first commercially successful game to implement convincing vehicular combat into an online multiplayer shooter format and bring a new dimension to virtual warfare. As a result, its influence has been immense. With the exception of perhaps *Counter-Strike: Source*, all of today's finest online shooters feature vehicles. It also doubled the player maximum to a then whopping 64 with little or no slowdown, something only recently surpassed by the epic *Joint Ops*.

THE WORLD was going to end in two weeks time. At least, that's what we'd all been led to believe, paranoia fuelled by the scaremongers, insistent that on the stroke of midnight 2000, every computer on the planet would meltdown, malfunction, take on a mind of its own, turn against humanity and wipe out every man, woman and child on the planet. It was then, in the twilight days of our world, a long-haired rookie games journo (some bloke called Korda apparently) was asked to spend the final few days of his short life reviewing an FPS called *Codename: Eagle*, designed by Swedish developer Refraction Games. The game featured a single-player campaign so dire that he awarded it a scathing 44 per cent, convinced that – despite its fun multiplayer options – the game would leave no mark on the history of gaming. Just like the Millennium Bug scaremongers though, he was very, very wrong.

Admittedly, *Codename: Eagle* bombed, selling few copies and receiving near-universal scorn for its unintelligent AI and dated graphics. Yet months later, whispers from the Net began hailing the game's multiplayer game as a work of genius.

"Freeform, vehicular-based FPS combat," they said. "Do anything, anywhere, at anytime," they claimed.

Within a year, *Codename: Eagle* had acquired cult status just as the popularity of online gaming was swelling like an allergic reaction thanks to the success of *Counter-Strike*, *Quake III: Arena* and *Unreal Tournament*. But it wasn't *Codename: Eagle* that would change the face of online shooters forever, but rather its spiritual successor *Battlefield 1942*, a game which single-handedly managed to redefine the genre and set new standards for other developers to aspire to.

Having completed work on *Codename: Eagle* – its debut

game – Refraction Games was assimilated by Digital Illusions and work began on *Battlefield 1942*, a project that had already been in the planning stages at Refraction since the mid-90s.

"We'd toyed with the idea in late 1996," recalls Digital Illusions' creative director and former Refraction member Johan Persson. "We discussed every possible setting from the modern day to WWII. Something we were clear on however, was that it should have dead-easy, consistent controls, be multiplayer focused and integrate land, air and sea-vehicles into a first-person shooter of *Quake*-simplicity. We wanted to create the ultimate feeling of freedom in an FPS."

Producer on *Battlefield 1942* Lars Gustavsson was also part of the *Codename: Eagle* development team that

PROFILE

Founded in the late '80s, Digital Illusions made its name with pinball games and then racing games like *Motorhead* and *Midtown Madness 3*. However, it wasn't until it bought Refraction Games and started on *Battlefield 1942* that it started making serious waves. *BF: Vietnam* failed to seriously build on the success, but the online gaming world took serious notice when DI unveiled the gorgeous *Battlefield 2*, set for release later this year.



NAME: Johan Persson

ROLE ON BF1942:

Lead programmer and
physics programmer

FIRST GAME WORKED ON:

Codename: *Eagle*

WHERE IS HE NOW? Creative director at Digital Illusions and currently working on a top-secret project that's set for release after *Battlefield 2*.



NAME: Lars Gustavsson

ROLE ON BF1942: Producer

FIRST GAME WORKED ON:

Codename: *Eagle*

WHERE IS HE NOW?

He's lead designer on *Battlefield 2*.



In *BF1942*, you could jump into any vehicle and drive anywhere you wanted.

went on to create the ground-breaking *Battlefield 1942*. "When I joined Refraction Games in 1999, the team was already working on *Codename: Eagle*. We felt that the multiplayer part of the game would be great to transfer into a WWII setting. In fact, the first demo of *Battlefield 1942* was actually created with the *Codename: Eagle* engine with Tiger tanks, Typhoon fighters, the battleship Bismarck, B-17s, submarines and much more."

CHALLENGE EVERYTHING

It wasn't long before *Battlefield 1942* attracted interest from publishing behemoth EA, clearly keen to make its mark on the rapidly expanding online shooter market. The driving force behind the game was to create a shooter that could strike a perfect balance between authenticity and the kind of pure, virtual war-based entertainment that had showed so much promise in *Codename: Eagle*. "We read loads of material, visited museums, talked to people and tried to dig up every little piece of information that could be of interest,"

recalls Gustavsson about the research that Digital Illusions conducted during *BF1942*'s development process. "Then once we had a good knowledge base, we started creating the game and quickly realised that if we had to choose between realism and fun gameplay, fun gameplay would always win."

The pressure was now on, and with the press slowly beginning to generate genuine interest in the project, great things were expected from the game. Digital Illusions was playing with the big boys now – Valve, Epic and id – and as if that wasn't daunting enough, the team also had to quickly learn how to adapt to new working practices and pressures within a very short space of time. This, after all, was its big chance to create the game that it believed *Codename: Eagle* should have been, a multiplayer-driven freeform shooter. And it only had one shot at getting it right.

"Having only just merged with Digital Illusions, this was the first major project for us guys from Refraction Games, and the team grew extremely quickly in a short space of time," remembers



BF1942 was realistic, but not to the detriment of entertainment.



The team that worked together most effectively would usually win.

Gustavsson. "Having a growing company at the same time as trying to lift yourself to manage a much bigger project was a daunting task. We had to go from a couple of guys sitting in an apartment, to organising ourselves as a company. We had to do proper planning, technical evaluations, manage larger teams and most of all, work towards a set timeline with a design that set out to do everything – land, sea and air combat in the same game with 64 players."

For two years, Digital Illusions lived, breathed and slept *Battlefield 1942*, working seven-day weeks and trainee-doctor working hours in order to hit its deadlines. After two years of feverish development, *Battlefield 1942* was finally ready for release. The response was phenomenal, proving a true vindication of Refraction's/Digital Illusions' vision that a vehicular-based multiplayer shooter could be commercially successful.

ROOTS

As the project progressed and public and press interest continued to intensify, it would have been all too easy for the team to have got carried away on a wave of hype and premature self congratulation. However, the developer never forgot its heritage, ensuring that it kept in constant contact with the small but fiercely loyal *Codename: Eagle* community, often using it as a sounding board for new ideas. In fact, such was the community's loyalty that one US-based fan even went as far as phoning Digital Illusions' local pizzeria every night to order food for the entire team so that none of them would have to take time out of development to get their own dinner. Now that's dedication.

DID YOU KNOW?

The original American plane in *Battlefield 1942* was a Mustang, but after some intensive research revealed it to be a carrier-based plane, Digital Illusions had to do away with it in order to maintain the game's authentic feel.

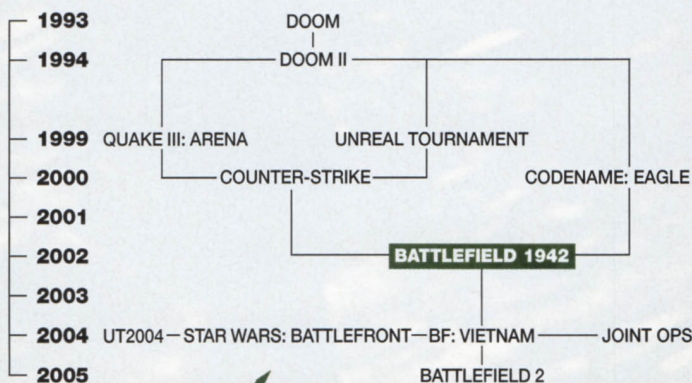
The game stormed to the top of the PC gaming charts, and within a few months of its release was already the world's second most popular online shooter, behind *Counter-Strike*. Its massive, freeform levels and 64-player games (up until this point, 32 had been the norm) provided

a new and exciting challenge for the now gargantuan online gaming community to sink its rapacious teeth into, providing an experience and freedom that no other shooter could offer.

Battlefield 1942's success is perhaps even more impressive given that its single-player campaign proved to be such a massive disappointment – an innovative and dynamic WWII campaign hideously marred by unintelligent AI that often made a mockery of the game's

FAMILY TREE

Battlefield 1942 was one of the defining moments in the evolution of the online/multiplayer shooter thanks to its massively successful introduction of vehicles, a feature that's now considered commonplace within the genre...





Levels ranged from Russia to the African desert.



Anti-aircraft guns were a bitch to master.

freeform nature. "From an AI standpoint it's one of the most complex games I can think of," says Persson. "A couple of bugs unfortunately destroyed much of the illusion."

Gustavsson is also big enough to admit that the AI was far from perfect. "We were too focused on the multiplayer. We knew we could do that well based on what we achieved with *Codename: Eagle*, and so we directed most of our resources at the game's multiplayer aspects rather than the single-player part. But the group of people who created the AI did well – with more resources, it could've been great."

Clearly, *Codename: Eagle*'s multiplayer game had massively influenced *Battlefield 1942*, but given that both games shipped with such poor single-player campaigns, it's striking to note just how much the gaming public's priorities had shifted in two years. *Codename: Eagle* had been scorned for its abysmal single-player campaign, with only a handful of fans ever fully appreciating its true multiplayer magic. Conversely, *Battlefield 1942* was hailed as a masterpiece, despite a single-player campaign that was virtually unplayable.

CLOSE, BUT...

Despite *Battlefield 1942*'s popularity – and the subsequent success of its expansion packs *Road To Rome* and *Secret Weapons of WWII* – both Gustavsson and Persson are the first to admit that it was far from being a perfect game. "I would have liked to have spent another 6-12 months polishing the game and making it more solid," claims Gustavsson. "The response on the multiplayer demo of Wake Island took us all by surprise and we could only implement parts of what we learnt from that before it was time to ship. That's why the first patch came so early."

For Persson, *Battlefield*'s shortfalls were more specific. "The artillery didn't quite become all that we wanted it to be, and if I could change it now, I'd have a slightly different line-up of vehicles. Also the naval battles weren't fun enough,

and I think that's something we could have spent more time refining."

RAISING THE STAKES

With the bar raised, FPS developers were forced to reassess their goals and projects. No longer would the public be satisfied with tired multiplayer deathmatch conventions, or restrictive linear levels bereft of vehicular combat. Digital Illusions and EA had taken the world of online gaming by surprise, and it wasn't until the release of Epic's sublime *UT2004* – a whole two years later – that *Battlefield 1942* was finally bettered. By then of course, the game had cemented its position as the world's top vehicular-based online shooter.

"The integration of vehicles into the genre of FPS games looks like it's here to stay," believes Persson. "Soon, it'll be so common that it won't even be mentioned as a feature. *BF1942*, along

with *Quake III* and *Unreal Tournament* showed that the market was ready for multiplayer-centric games."

But Digital Illusions wasn't content to just sit back and soak up the plaudits. Work began almost immediately on the solid though similar *Battlefield Vietnam*, and more importantly, on *Battlefield 1942*'s true sequel, *Battlefield 2*. With its sparkling new engine and innovative new ideas, Digital Illusions could be on the verge of reclaiming the crown that it held on to for so long with *Battlefield 1942*.

And to think it was all thanks to an overlooked shooter that everyone (including a wet-behind-the-ears games journalist) wrote off as a single-player dud, whose multiplayer game provided the blueprint for one of the most groundbreaking games of the millennium so far. What are the chances of that? Probably about as high as the world ending at the stroke of midnight 2000. Nearly. [P2]

THE FUTURE

BATTLEFIELD TOO

This summer, *Battlefield 2* will finally ship – and from what we've seen of it so far, it could just be the best multiplayer game ever. Featuring vastly improved teamplay that'll hopefully make cohesive teamplay a reality rather than an optimistic dream, *Battlefield 2* is set to feature squad leaders who'll be able to issue orders to members of their squad as well as acting as mobile spawn points.

Even more exciting is the integration of a player-controlled Commander unit, who have access to a strategic map from which they can direct the actions of an entire team. With all-new vehicles and soldier classes and the added impact of modern weaponry, *Battlefield 2* really is looking like a class act in its new desert-combat setting. Expect a review to be winging its way to you in the very near future.



Battlefield 2 uses a new engine and is based on modern warfare.

"Our design set out to do everything – land, sea and air combat in the same game with 64 players"

LARS GUSTAVSSON PRODUCE *BF1942*



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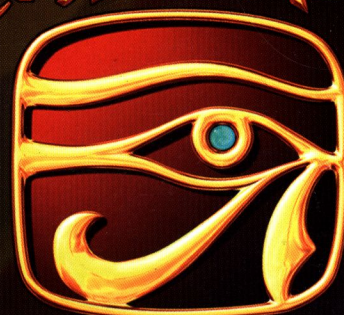
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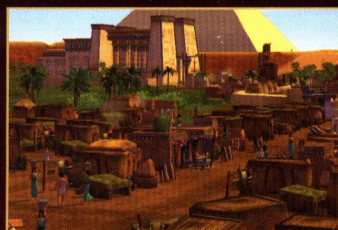
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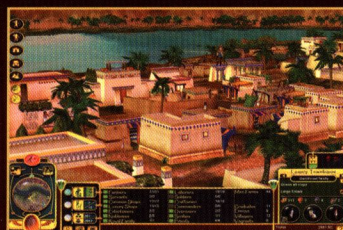
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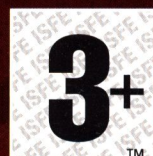
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